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THESIS

AMERICA AND THE CONTAINMENT OF ARAB RADICAL  
NATIONALISM: THE EISENHOWER YEARS

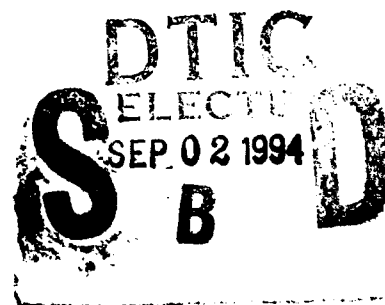
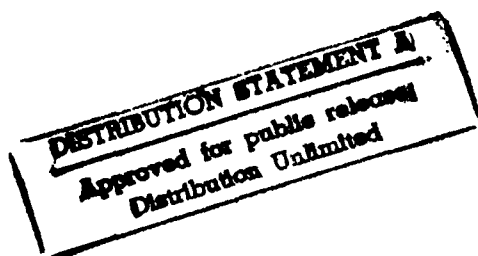
by

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## Introduction

Hours before committing Marines to intervene in the Lebanese civil war during July 1958, President Eisenhower reflected on the general Arab attitude: "the trouble is that we have a campaign of hatred against us, not by the governments but by the people" and "the people are on Nasser's side".<sup>1</sup> This perception was neither profound nor new in the thinking of Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Both men were aware of the general hostility America's intervention could generate. Almost two years earlier, during November 1956, when the United States rebuked Britain at Suez, Dulles had written:

I could not see any end to the situation that might be created if the British and the French occupied the canal...They would make bitter enemies of the entire population of the Middle East....

Everywhere they would be compelled to maintain themselves by force and...their own economy would be weakened virtually beyond repair...The Soviet Union would reap the benefit of a greatly weakened Europe and would move into a position of predominant influence in the Middle East....<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Douglas Little's, "Cold War and Covert Action: The United States and Syria, 1945-1958", Middle East Journal, Winter 1990, Vol. 44, #1. p.79.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen's, Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences (Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 201-02.



Had America's policy changed drastically in only twenty-one months to the point where it was committing its own Suez crisis?

In Lebanon, Eisenhower and Dulles knew they were opposing the very force which had eaten away at the British position, a force which they understood in terms of its strength and weaknesses. The radical nationalists' goals of independence and autonomy from previous decades of Western imperialism found sympathetic ears in the White House, appealing to America's own historical values.<sup>3</sup> Both Washington and Cairo shared mutual objectives of: blocking the internal spread of communism, establishing strong political and economically independent states, and ensuring defense from outside threats. The means to obtaining these goals would prove to be different however. Nasser's would pursue a revolutionary path, while Washington advocated an evolutionary process in the transformation and defense of the Arab East.<sup>4</sup> The emergence of Nasser and radical nationalism throughout the area required a modified approach to secure Western interests.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Packenham, Liberal America and the Third World, Political Development Ideas in Foreign Aid and Social Sciences (Princeton, 1973), Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> The Arab East is defined in this paper as Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.



Dominant in this new approach was Dulles' concern with the weaknesses of Nasser's brand of nationalism. Following his 1953 trip to the region, Dulles accurately assessed Arab hostility to Western imperialism, their fear of an expansionist Israel, and the United States' awkward position as its benefactor. In his observations lay the direction United States' foreign policy was to pursue. Testifying before a Congressional Senate committee Dulles stated, "Let none forget that the Kremlin uses extreme nationalism to bait the trap by which it seeks to capture the dependent peoples".<sup>5</sup> Dulles believed radical nationalism could also be a potential Soviet weapon to be used in disrupting if not destroying Western strategic interests.

America's reaction to this potential weakness would lead to the Eisenhower Doctrine, new commitments to the stability of Jordan, the American-Syrian crisis, and ultimately to the containment of the nationalist revolution in Lebanon and Jordan during 1958. It would also prove to be one of the most misinterpreted elements of the Eisenhower era. Although Eisenhower and Dulles would achieve their ultimate objectives, their policy would be considered by many observers to be a

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<sup>5</sup> "Six Major Policy Issues": Address by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to Congress upon his return from the region, 1 JUN 53.



failure. Citing the Administration's over emphasis on stopping communist subversion, critics would contend that Dulles in particular defined regional characters and events within the context of the global Cold War. Eisenhower and Dulles in fact pursued the opposite, trying to keep the global Cold War from coming into the Arab East.



Anglo-American Interests and the Character  
of Radical Nationalism

In 1952, two types of Arab nationalism were firmly established in the Middle East. The conservative version included older statesmen who had led the new Arab countries after World War I. In many ways they carried over the existing social order and political practices from the Ottoman era. Political elites dominated quasi-parliamentary states by means of favoritism, rigged elections, and pay offs. Power flowed along pre-nineteenth century class lines. "Feudal" style land owners, established merchant families, and various tribal or sectarian leaders monopolized political power and national resources through the government machinery.<sup>6</sup> The conservative nationalists were remnants of the elite who had colluded with the French and British empires. They were generally pro-West and key players in representing Western interests in their national policies.

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<sup>6</sup> Numerous sources exist on this topic. See Marwan Buheiry, The Formation and Perception of the Modern Arab World, A.H. Hourani, Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay and A History of Arab Peoples, and Kamal Salibi, A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered.



The social character of the conservative nationalists also encouraged the political orientation of the next generation. Oil and Western aid increased national wealth, but little benefit filtered down to the classes below the elite. Both British and American leaders recognized the unstable ground on which their influence was based. In 1949, Britain's Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin wrote:

The old regimes which we were forced to support, would not stand up to revolutionary conditions and would be swept away. These regimes were greedy and selfish and had not allowed any of the wealth which they had made out of the war and out of the oil to benefit the poorer classes. If we continue to support them we should be blamed in the event of the Communists succeeding in turning the people of the Middle East against us....

This observation was followed in 1952, by America's Secretary of State Dean Acheson:

The Middle East presented a picture that might have been drawn by Karl Marx himself- with the masses disinherited, ...no middle class, a small and corrupt ruling class pushed about by foreigners who sought to exploit priceless resources, whether oil or canal. Was there ever such an opportunity to invoke inherent xenophobia to destroy the foreigner and his system and substitute the Communist solution?

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Wm. Roger Louis, The British Empire in the Middle East (Oxford, 1984), p. 604.



Anglo-American solidarity on a policy of sitting tight offered no solution, but was like a couple locked in warm embrace in a rowboat about to go over Niagara Falls. It was high time to break the embrace and take to the oars.....

The direction in which both the British and the Americans began moving in the early fifties was toward economic development. Both governments looked at their own histories and hoped to achieve long term social stability in Arab countries through economic prosperity.<sup>9</sup> Their processes were evolutionary and optimistic. It would require decades to accomplish what had taken centuries in their own societies.<sup>10</sup> It also required numerous foreign technicians and progressive political leaders, the latter being excluded from the political process by the conservatives. Many of these younger leaders also did not share the Western patience, optimism, or strategic concerns.

Ensuring the flow of Middle East oil was the basic goal of Anglo-American policy in the region. Europe's economic recovery after World War II depended on this resource. In Eisenhower's

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Dean Acheson, Present at Creation (New York, 1969), p. 600.

<sup>9</sup> The American and British philosophies regarding economic development can be found in Michael Ionides, Divide and Lose, Burton Kaufman, Trade and Aid, and Millikan and Rostow, A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy.

<sup>10</sup> Egey Sangmuah, "Eisenhower and Containment in North Africa, 1956-1960", MEJ, Winter 1990, Vol. 44, #1, p. 78.



words it ranked, "almost in equal priority with an adequate supply for ourselves".<sup>11</sup> Maintaining the flow of oil rested upon two strategies: First, stability of Arab regimes friendly to the West, and second, their physical security from an external Soviet military threat. Stability entailed strong popularly supported governments which would stand-up against domestic revolutionary forces. Both the United States and Britain devised programs of economic aid and development in an attempt to eliminate wide spread poverty, considered the root cause of discontent and a breeding ground for communist sympathies. Military security was to be obtained through assistance in arms supplies and regional alliances, such as the Baghdad Pact, designed to contain the expansion of the Soviet Union into the Middle East. But the implementation of both strategies required a degree of control or influence over the domestic and foreign policies of the Arab countries. This in itself increased the hostility to the Western powers by the younger nationalists, a hostility Dulles sought to avoid.

Before the Suez crisis the United States had walked a fine line between sympathy for Nasser's revolutionary objectives and providing full support for her British allies. In a 1953

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<sup>11</sup> Legislative Leadership Meeting, 8 MAY 56, Box 2, Legislative Meeting Series, Eisenhower Papers.



testimony to Congress, Dulles said:

...without breaking from the framework of Western unity, we can pursue our traditional dedication to political liberty. In reality, the Western powers can gain, rather than lose, from an orderly development of self government....

In short, the United States supported the independence goals of Nasser's generation, providing they did not threaten the orderly transition of power. But when the evolutionary process appeared to be threatened as in Iran during 1953, or Syria in 1956, Washington did not hesitate to contemplate or actually use covert operations to influence domestic events.<sup>13</sup> Yet, the American official mind of the late forties and early fifties was also generally negative and sometimes openly hostile to what it perceived as the continued imperial behavior of Britain. Immediately after the Egyptian revolution, the United States sought to co-opt Nasser into the West's cause in the Cold War.<sup>14</sup> The British believed this reflected American naivete' and inexperience in the region.

Robin Hankey, the British embassy Charge'd'affairs,

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<sup>12</sup> "Six Major Policy Issues": Address by the Secretary of State to Congress on 1 JUN 53.

<sup>13</sup> Little, "Cold War and Covert Action", p. 51-55.

<sup>14</sup> Early American efforts at bringing Nasir into the Western alliance are described in Wilbur Eveland, Ropes of Sand, (W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1980)



described American efforts in Egypt as "starry eyed". He particularly singled out the American Ambassador, Jefferson Caffery, for playing the middle between Egyptian nationalism and British imperialism. Sir William Strang, Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office reported: "There seemed to be people in the U.S. embassies who were dominated by the old anti-colonial feeling to the extent they seemed to think the British were always wrong".<sup>15</sup> Clement Attlee contributed to the British complaint in his open article in Foreign Affairs 1954, reminding the Americans of Britain's long term experience with the Arabs versus the United States whose status to them was one of "newcomers".<sup>16</sup> The primary British criticism was that America was supporting forces which threatened to de-stabilize the region. In short, who would control the road to orderly development, self government and thus, stability and security? Would nasserist radicals and "non-alignment" be given partnership in the responsibility for the economic and strategic security of the West? The British thought not.

The "progressive" or radical nationalists in the region matured not only during the time of the British and French

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted Louis and Owen, Suez 1956, p. 60.

<sup>16</sup> Clement Attlee, "Britain and America, Common Aims, Different Opinions", Foreign Affairs, Vol 32, No. 2, JAN 1954.



mandates, but during the rise of Soviet Russia and spread of European socialism. The egalitarian precepts of socialism found fertile ground among elite and middle class social critics, creating an environment in the 1950's where an intellectual usually meant a Marxist and at least a democrat.<sup>17</sup> It was particularly appealing to young military officers, many with origins in the lower middle income and poor agrarian classes.

By 1954, the Soviets, like their Czarist predecessors, looked at the Middle East with renewed interest. It was filled with opportunities to score regional victories against the United States in the global competition of the Cold War. Moscow also provided the radical nationalists with an alternative source of economic and military resources. External support, usually necessary to tip the balance of power in internal struggles, was no longer based on collusion with Western imperial powers alone. The Soviet Union was also an economic model of sorts for the internal transformation of Arab societies. Its rapid industrialization and modernization presented what appeared a much better alternative to the decades of evolutionary growth under the old "feudal" classes envisioned

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<sup>17</sup> Abdul Salaam Yousif, "The Struggle for Cultural Hegemony", Chapter 10 of Louis and Fernea, The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited (London, 1991), p. 176-77.



in the Anglo-American models.

### Conflicts in National Interests

After consolidating his power and securing a British evacuation treaty by late 1954, Nasser began to focus on more regional issues. The Czech Arms Deal in 1955, and merely surviving the Suez invasion in 1956, flaunted the new terms of independence in the face of the old imperial powers. Internal policies geared toward land redistribution, nationalization of industry, and plans to increase economic autonomy signaled a change in the social order, not just a break from imperialism. The policy of non-alignment became the stated foreign policy of the new Egypt. While it was not an absolute embrace with the Soviet Union, it was a strong symbolic rejection of dependence or alignment with the West which had served as the "evil force" in the radicals mobilization of the people. The Czech Arms deal greatly irritated Washington, but Nasser's inability to deal with Israel led to a break in the White House's tolerance.

Israel was the largest problem in the Egyptian-American relation. The Arab frustration and hostility to the Jewish State was initially absorbed by the British. But as the British Empire retracted and the role of the United States grew, so did



the difficulty of reconciling Washington's support of Israel to the Arab world. Israeli security interests made it impossible for Washington to fully meet those of the Arabs. If the weapons purchases were not blocked by political lobbying, pro-Israel representatives in congress insisted on sending American advisors with the such aid.<sup>18</sup> For Nasser, the return of Western military personnel was as irreconcilable as re-establishing relations with Britain.

Washington attempted to reduce the negative affects of its Israeli connection by launching the Anderson peace mission in January of 1956. A resolution between Egypt and Israel could, in Washington's eyes, at least achieve cordial relations with the radical nationalists. Nasser's reaction to the proposal was simple and prophetic. Upon realizing the American plan entailed Egyptian recognition of Israel he said, "I could never do that, I'd be assassinated!".<sup>19</sup> Eisenhower's reaction was much deeper.

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<sup>18</sup> Although the Mutual Security Act of 1954 required U.S. advisors accompany arms to ensure the terms of their intended usage, similar shipments went to other countries, including Israel, without advisors.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in H.W. Brandis, The Specter of Neutralism: The US and the Emergence of the Third World 1947-1960, p. 260-62. In Waging Peace, p. 185-89, Eisenhower describes the actions of both the Egyptians and the Israelis regarding Israeli withdrawal from positions in Gaza, taken during the February 1955 raid. Although both sides dragged their feet on a potential settlement, Eisenhower centered the blame on Nasir after he moved his administrators back into Gaza, apparently in violation



He identified Nasser as the "primary stumbling block" towards a greater Arab-Israeli peace settlement which Washington needed to achieve stability in the Arab East.<sup>20</sup> But Nasser could never compromise on the Israeli issue and maintain his spreading popularity and political influence. The Administration wanted to appear neutral in a dispute where the Israelis and radical nationalists were absolutely polarized. When America was trying to align the Near East against the Soviets in the context of the Cold War, the Arab-Israeli dispute left no middle ground by the antagonists very own "with us or against us" mentality.

Nasser's foreign policy also threatened the basis of American strategy. The Czech arms deal enabled the Soviet Union to jump over the Northern Tier states compromising the Baghdad Pact. This broke the pillar of security in the Anglo-American strategy, giving Soviets military advisors access into Egypt and later Syria. Egypt's acceptance of Soviet funding and technical assistance to build the Aswan dam threatened the second pillar, economic development. Washington always had a sense of superiority in her economic resources. They were used as a large carrot for developing nations to follow the Western line.

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of the negotiations, after months of diplomacy by American representatives.

<sup>20</sup> Robert H. Ferrell, The Eisenhower Diaries, p. 319.



But Moscow began economic aid, coupled with less restrictive payment terms in late 1954, threatening America's self perceived monopoly on development.<sup>21</sup> By the end of 1956, Nasser not only rid himself of the British presence, but expanded his sources for foreign economic and military assistance. Egypt's "positive neutralism", the basis of Nasser's foreign policy success and regional popularity, was also the key justification to his own domestic political stability.<sup>22</sup> The American administration saw it as a practical political move on Nasser's part.<sup>23</sup> But when America's relation with Israel was added into the equation, Egyptian neutralism quickly leaned towards the Soviet Union.

By March 1958, it became apparent to the Administration that Nasser would not be co-opted to support American interests. Eisenhower began to identify Nasser himself as a threat:

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<sup>21</sup> Kaufman, Trade and Aid, Chapter 4.

<sup>22</sup> Hrair R. Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasir: A Study in Political Dynamics (Albany, N.Y., 1971) p. 40. Throughout 1955, as Nasir's foreign policy successes increased, internal Egyptian opposition to his regime decreased.

<sup>23</sup> H. W. Brandis, "What Eisenhower and Dulles Saw in Nasser", American-Arab Affairs, #17, Summer 1986. Also, in Brandis, Specter of Neutralism, parts I and II, the author concludes that neither Dulles or Eisenhower were hostile to neutralism providing it did not run counter to U.S. interests.



A fundamental problem is the growing ambition of Nasser, the sense of power he has gained out of his associations with the Soviets, his belief that he can emerge as the true leader of the entire Arab world...

Because of this, I suggested to the State Department that we begin to build up some other individual...in the thought that mutually antagonistic personal ambitions might disrupt the aggressive plans that Nasser is evidently developing...<sup>24</sup>

Eisenhower and Dulles did not see him as a Soviet stooge, but neither could they confidently determine his basic political orientations. Nasser was his own man, but for how long? The Administration began to look to the conservative Arab leaders to rally a pro-West bloc of Arab states.<sup>25</sup> The global strategy of the Cold War was being applied at the regional level. Nasser was to be isolated and his revolution contained. This would require Washington to enter the under currents of Arab politics at a time when the foundations of these regimes foundations were dramatically changing.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia were aligned against Iraq's bid for regional Arab leadership. The Saudi position in 1956 was based on historical and contemporary considerations. Traditionally at

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Brandis', Specter of Neutralism, p. 323.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid #19. Eisenhower's choice as an alternative to Nasir would be King Saud of Saudi Arabia. According to Neff, Warriors at Suez, p.317, American organization of Arab states in opposition to Nasir began in October 1956.



odds with the Hashemite monarchies of Iraq and Jordan, King Saud wished to contain Iraqi aspirations of being the leader of the Arab states. The Iraqi, Saudi, and Egyptian governments competed for regional predominance and at times outright control, of Syria and Jordan. There was also friction between Saudi Arabia and Britain. The Saudis challenged British efforts to control the Gulf in the 1920s. In 1955, after a two year dispute and Saudi occupation, the British took the Burami Oasis. King Saud countered with support to tribal leaders threatening the British position in Yemen.<sup>26</sup> Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt attacked the Iraqi alliance with Britain as remnants of imperial control.

The United States was strategically aligned with Britain, yet a regional proponent of Riyadh. It was also ironic in that it was Saudi oil that Washington sought to secure, primarily for Western European use. While Iraq had her patron, Saudi Arabia was being courted by America. Egypt had yet to confirm her global partner. Past experience and Anglo-Iraqi relations excluded Britain. Border problems with Israel excluded the United States. But the Suez invasion and Moscow's subsequent

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<sup>26</sup> The clash of national, regional and international interests regarding American-Saudi and Anglo-American interests and relations are addressed in Davis Lesch's, Syria and the United States: Eisenhower's Cold War in the Middle East (Westview Press, 1992), p. 129-32.



support provided Nasser the impetus to move closer to the Soviets. Such a move was also not inconsistent with Egypt's internal policies.

Following Bandung, socialist dogma became more frequent in Nasser's speeches. Throughout 1955, capitalism came under increasing attack by the government.<sup>27</sup> The Egyptian constitution of January 1956, institutionalized a mixed socialist-capitalist economy.<sup>28</sup> After its publication, some Communist Party members were released, although the Egyptian regime remained suspicious of the Party. With the nationalization of the Canal and the beginning of the Suez crisis, Nasser mobilized all the forces he could. The Egyptian Communist Party praised Nasser's actions for moving Egypt's revolution to a "higher plane" which they contended was possible by the economic and political support of a "reinvigorated" socialist camp.<sup>29</sup> With the Tripartite attack in October, more left wing critics of the regime were released from confinement and used to organize and fight in Port Sa'id. By the end of Suez, many of the Egyptian radical left were out of prison.

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<sup>27</sup> For discussion of anti-capitalist measures, see Charles Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 52-3.

<sup>28</sup> Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasir, p.127.

<sup>29</sup> M. S. Agwani, Communism in the Arab East (India, 1969), p. 80.



being incorporated into government ministries, and establishing party contacts in other Arab countries.

The left wing political parties of the Arab East comprised the majority of the radical nationalists and grew in popularity during the 1950s. Two of the most important would be the Ba'th Socialist Party and the Communist Party. The Ba'th was strongly anti-West. It considered Western imperialism to be the cause of contemporary Arab divisions, the existence of Israel, and the perpetuation of the old social status quo. Its founder, Michael Aflaq, was also the author of Pan-Arabism, advocating the unity of Arab states into one nation. The Ba'th and Communist parties were not instantly successful. They did not control the government bureaucracies or satisfy the skepticism of the commercial classes in regards to domestic policies. The Ba'th and the communists would overcome this handicap by allying themselves against the conservatives, a practice which increased their power and eventually their suspicions of each other. As the Arab East became increasingly anti-West, the left would capitalize on their Soviet contacts, declaring political neutralism in the Cold War.

Nasser was also willing to use the Cold War rivalry to his advantage, which alarmed both Eisenhower and Dulles as early as 1955. Egypt's increasing socialism during 1956, added to



suspicious in the White House that Nasser was slowly becoming entrapped by Soviet advisors who would subvert and dominate affairs in Egypt. Washington's concerns about Nasser, were the mirror image of the radical nationalists about Western advisors. Yet Dulles still sought to "avoid any open break which would throw Nasser irrevocably into a Soviet satellite status" and provide him "a bridge back to good relations with the West".<sup>30</sup> Despite Nasser's growing estrangement from Western interests, Dulles was reluctant to force an open confrontation. This was based off American observations during Suez, and popular Arab reaction towards Britain and France.

Washington however, was in the process of inheriting primary leadership and responsibility to pursue stability which entailed containing the spread of Egypt's revolutionary spirit. Dulles and Eisenhower needed a means to confront and contain Nasser, without appearing to be purposely targeting him. The American domestic and regional Arabic forces that the Administration had to contend with would result in one of the most misunderstood policies of the Eisenhower era.

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Louis and Owen's, Suez and its Consequences, p. 191.



Radical Nationalism and the Eisenhower Doctrine

One of John Foster Dulles' primary points throughout the Suez crisis of 1956, was to avoid any action that would further enhance the prestige of Nasser. The Anglo-French-Israeli intervention had precisely the impact he feared. Allen Dulles, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, concluded that the primary result of the invasion was a "unanimous revulsion" and "revival of age-old hatred of Western imperialism and colonialism" in the Arab peoples.<sup>31</sup> The joint attack swelled regional outrage against the West and elevated Nasser's popularity. The Suez crisis also greatly diminished Britain's capability to promote Western influence. As Iraq would soon prove, close association with London was now a serious political liability for an Arab government.

The Administration saw itself now as being primarily responsible for Western interests and the security of moderate regimes in the Arab East. The American strategy remained the same; to achieve stability. With Britain's influence reduced, Washington needed a policy change. Fearing expanding subversion

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<sup>31</sup> Memorandum of meeting with legislative leaders, 9 NOV 1956, Legislative meeting series, Staff secretary records. Quoted in Brands, The Specter of Nationalism, P. 280.



sponsored from Moscow or Cairo, the White House wanted a means to actively confront both. The result of the Administrations efforts became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. The most well known function of the Doctrine, or Resolution 117, was to put the Soviet Union on notice that the United States considered the Arab East a vital American interest. Another equally vital function was to stop Nasser's expansion, without igniting Arab emotions similar to those that exploded during the canal invasion. It is this second function in which the Eisenhower administration planned to channel and contain Arab radical nationalism.

Little changed regarding the American assessment of Soviet tactics. Washington believed that the two primary objectives of the Kremlin were to; "undermine Western political and military power in the area" and "weaken the West economically and strategically" by reducing its access to oil. The Administration considered direct military action in the area by Russia a low probability.<sup>32</sup> The focus of Eisenhower and Dulles sharpened on Egypt and Syria as the principle instruments of instability. Nasser was a political problem due to his mass popularity and willingness to use it against pro-West Arab

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<sup>32</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate 11-10-56, "Soviet Actions in the Middle East", 29 NOV 1956. Foreign Relations of the United States, p. 355. (Referred to hereafter as FRUS)



regimes. Syria was increasingly perceived as becoming a Soviet satellite, also opening up "greater political and subversive opportunities" in other Arab nations.<sup>33</sup> The White House's distinction between Nasser's nationalism and what it considered a more classical Soviet supported subversion in Syria was subtle, yet significant in the manner American power would be projected.

Nasser was not considered a stooge of Moscow. The problem was that his popularity transcended national boundaries and could inspire similar revolutions in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, or even Saudi Arabia. While Nasser's could easily mobilize support for a revolution in another Arab country, there was no guarantee he could control the results. Within the instability of a revolt or coup, Washington feared the Arab communists would gain the initiative over the Nasserists, seize the government, and pave the way for Soviet domination.<sup>34</sup> Dulles perceived a

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid #2.

<sup>34</sup> Though not specifically stated, Dulles appeared fearful that Syria and Egypt could cause a regional "Czech Scenario". During his 7 JAN 1957, testimony to the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, Dulles described his impressions of the Czechoslovakian crises in 1948. Dulles felt the country submitted to a Communist Party take over because of Russian troops massed on the border at the time. The Czech peoples fear of invasion, particularly when no other power sought to counter the external Soviet Threat, was the principle reason the subversion was successful. See P. 13-14, Economic and Military Cooperation with Nations in the General Area of the Middle East,



pattern of planned coercion from the Kremlin. Moscow would first provide military and economic aid. They would then ensure the aid was controlled by Soviet sympathizers in the target country, providing the individual with powerful resources. Eventually these resources would be used to submit the country to international communism, controlled from Moscow.<sup>35</sup> Dulles believed Nasser and his desire to "fulfill his role" would create conditions the Kremlin would exploit.

Syria appeared to be such a situation. Throughout 1955 and most of 1956, conservatives struggled against an uneasy alliance of the socialist Ba'th Party and the communists for control of the parliament. The Suez crisis and subsequent exposure of a British-Iraqi coup attempt, seriously undermined the popularity of the conservative Syrian politicians.<sup>36</sup> Particularly after Suez, any radical challenge to a conservative government was likely to generate large public support simply by espousing anti-West positions. As of December 1956 however,

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United States Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1957.

<sup>35</sup> Dulles to Eisenhower, 20 AUG 1957, FRUS, P.641.

<sup>36</sup> Lesch, David W. Syria and the United States: Eisenhower's Cold War in the Middle East, Chapters 5 and 6. See also, Abu Jaber, The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party. For discussion of British-Iraqi intrigue in Syria during 1956, see Little's "Cold War and Covert Action", Middle East Journal, Winter 1990, Vol. 44, #1.



neither the socialists nor the communists could gain supremacy over the other. Each used the imperialist threat as a political platform to rally domestic support. In trying to outdo each other, they increased the country's economic and military ties to the Soviet Union. This was precisely the pattern Dulles feared. When Nasser's popularity was added to the force of anti-Western sentiments, the potential dangers of Washington projecting its own regional interests doubled.

Eisenhower and Dulles needed to more actively support pro-West regimes, but could not appear to be directly challenging Nasser and his "progressive" Arab nationalism. This concern was reflected in a State Department planning document recommending a new regional approach. The Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs listed the "ambitions of Nasser" as the first of three factors behind Soviet penetration of the region. Reducing Nasser's "power and influence" was the first of four requirements considered necessary for a new American program to succeed. Yet in order to mobilize support from other Arab countries, the Bureau concluded "our actions will be largely self defeating if they create a general impression that our objective is to directly overthrow Nasser".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Paper prepared by the Dept of State Near Eastern Policy Planning Staff, "Program to Counter Soviet Penetration of the Middle East", 5 DEC 1956. FRUS, p. 383.



The American dilemma was clear. Nasser was the immediate threat to Western interests, due to the popularity behind his social as well as political revolution. But specifically identifying him as a policy target risked creating popular Arab reaction against the United States. It would also make it difficult for conservative Arab leaders to request American assistance without being associated with a foreign threat to the Arab nationalist hero. Yet pro-West Arab nations, in and out of the Baghdad Pact, were also calling on the White House to clarify its position in the region.<sup>38</sup> Eisenhower, Dulles, and the primary staff in State and Defense perceived the need to act rapidly. If not, moderate Arab regimes would be forced to seek a middle ground with Nasser and the Soviets to ensure their own survival.

#### Searching for a Means to Apply the Doctrine

Since 1955, the Baghdad Pact served as the principle

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<sup>38</sup> In addition to countries of the Baghdad Pact, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia were also seeking stronger assurances of United States resolve to support. See memorandum, "Notes on Presidential-Bipartisan Congressional Leadership Meeting", 1 JAN 1957. FRUS, p. 434.



instrument for demonstrating Western power and resolve. Britain had been the primary Western power in the Pact, due to consistent American hesitation to become a full signatory.<sup>39</sup> On 4 December 1956, despite the intensification of anti-British feelings in the region, the American Secretary of Defense recommended to Eisenhower that the United States formally join the Pact. Of the principle reasons, Secretary Wilson stated: "to fill the political and military vacuum" created by Britain's decline as a result of Suez, to "reinforce the firm support of the U.S." to the collective security of regional conservative states. This would presumably "demonstrate to the Soviet Union" the resolve of the United States to "protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity" of the Arab states.<sup>40</sup> The recommendation noted the probable negative reactions that such a move would generate in the Arab world; but it also treated them as secondary to the requirement of sending an immediate warning to the Soviets and assurance to regional allies.

A second proposal, generated in the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs under William

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<sup>39</sup> William Stivers, America's Confrontation with Revolutionary Change in the Middle East (St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 12-13.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Secretary of Defense (Wilson) to the President, 4 DEC 1956. Eisenhower Library, Staff Secretary Records. FRUS, p. 372.



Rountree, reached Dulles' desk the next day. This proposal rejected Baghdad Pact membership because most Arab nations associated it with an extension of British control. Could the United States afford to step in to the British position in the Pact and not expect to be regarded as a new power in an old game? Not in Rountree's opinion. The bureau proposed replacing the Pact with "A New Grouping of Middle Eastern States". The proposal stated:

This framework will have to accord with the basic drives of the area-which is to say in addition to being anti-Communist it will also have to be anti-imperialist and pro-nationalist. It will, also, unfortunately, have to recognize the strong anti-Israeli sentiments of most of the area states...

Essentially Rountree and his staff recommended that work begin on an entirely new organization, larger in scope than the Baghdad Pact. It specifically excluded Israel, as well as two key European allies, Britain and France. With an optimistic implementation date of 28 January 1957, the proposal risked failure by trying to create a consensus of conservative Arab nations in a short period of time.

Whatever the approach would be it had to be in a form Arab allies could adopt, without fueling radical nationalist

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<sup>41</sup> Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs(Rountree) to the Secretary of State, "Revised Proposal for a New Middle Eastern Grouping", 5 DEC 1956. FRUS, p. 376.



propaganda. The essence of the problem and hints of the solution were highlighted during a December 7th meeting in the State Department:

...to find a vehicle for meeting the desire of the Arab governments, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iraq, for a convincing demonstration of U.S. intention to make its power felt in the area in a manner which would not smack of imperialism and which would leave the initiative to local countries...<sup>42</sup>

Dulles agreed with his own department that membership in the Baghdad Pact would play into the hands of the nationalists; but he appeared less inclined to follow Rountree's recommendation on the Middle East Charter. The Charter would involve months if not years to develop. In the interim, the United States would be without an instrument to handle interim problems in the region. American security concerns were rising as many countries were experiencing immediate economic problems. Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia were losing considerable revenues due to the closure of the canal and destruction of pipeline across Syria.<sup>43</sup> Dulles believed this could soon lead to social and political instability. The vehicle, in addition to being

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<sup>42</sup> Informal Record of a Meeting, Secretary Dulles' Office, Department of State, "Middle East", 7 DEC 1956, FRUS, p. 393.

<sup>43</sup> See paragraph 26, State Department Operations Coordinating Board Report, "Progress Report on U.S. Objectives and Policies With Respect to the Near East", released 22 December 1956, FRUS, p. 427.



quickly obtainable, also needed the ability to distribute military and economic support on short notice in order to be effective.

Dulles realized any policy change would also require maneuvering through a gauntlet of U.S. domestic interests. There was a risk in the process of provoking increased subversion from the Soviets or radical nationalists, if they perceived that the American government was not united. Dulles illustrated his concern to the American Ambassadors of the Baghdad Pact countries. He asked them, "suppose we can't get a 2/3 vote of Congress to join the Baghdad Pact without guaranteeing the same sort of thing to Israel, would you still want us to join? The (Secretary) said none of the Ambassadors knew the answer to that."<sup>44</sup> This same dilemma applied to the State Department's "New Middle East Grouping". Rountree's proposal did not explain how the administration would get Congress to support an organization which recognized "strong anti-Israeli sentiments".

Eisenhower and Dulles decided on a Congressional resolution, which would eventually be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. It would demonstrate, with Congressional support,

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<sup>44</sup> Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the President and Secretary of State, 6 December 1956. FRUS, p. 390.



American determination to bolster the military defense capabilities and economies of countries whose governments showed a determination to combat Communist infiltration".<sup>45</sup> This would be the equivalent of a commitment to promote stability in the region by containing subversion or reducing external political coercion from Egypt or Syria. Being a bi-lateral policy, between the United States and the country requesting support, the White House hoped to avoid placing a stigma on pro-West Arab governments which radical nationalist propaganda could label as lackeys of imperialism. It also kept the United States away from being formally associated with an organization that could be accused of "supporting" or "threatening" the security interests of Israel.<sup>46</sup> Within the next 90 days, the Doctrine would be worded to pass a Congressional vote and at the same time give the administration a capability to intervene quickly in different types of conflicts.

#### Rhetoric and Continuity in Strategy

In addition to placating popular anti-Western sentiments

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<sup>45</sup> Memorandum of Conversation Between the Secretary of State and Senator Knowland, 8 DEC 1956. FRUS, p. 397.

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the President and Secretary of State, 8 DEC 1956, FRUS, p. 394.



against a more interventionist American role, the administration needed to sell its increased involvement to Congress. Rountree summed up the administration's domestic legislative strategy in a memorandum to Dulles:

Communist imperialism is a clear and present danger and is so recognized by the American people and their representatives in Congress. We consider it unlikely that the latter would approve a resolution not aimed specifically at Communist imperialism...<sup>47</sup>

In the text of the Eisenhower Doctrine, communist imperialism was transcribed to international communism, which reflected Dulles' consistent concerns of the Soviets using the radical nationalists. In Dulles' mind, Moscow's ultimate plan was to subjugate the Middle Eastern states, as it had done to those in Eastern Europe. By painting the doctrine as a fight against communism, the White House reduced the possibility of congressional rejection. Not even the administration's sharpest policy critics wanted to appear "soft on communism". It also avoided explaining to Congress why the administration was confronting nationalism, particularly after trying to co-opt Nasser the previous three years. This would have been an admission of failed foreign policy. It would also avoided

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<sup>47</sup> Memorandum From Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Murphy) to the Secretary of State, "Proposed Joint Resolution of Congress Regarding the Middle East", 15 DEC 1956. Drafted by Rountree and Wilkins. FRUS, p. 410.



exposing the Doctrine's primary target, Nasser and the radical nationalists.

This inability to openly clarify the target of the resolution created ambiguities however, which incidently became the source of questions during subsequent congressional hearings. Representatives sought to clarify the resolution's use of "subversion" and "countries controlled by international communism". The resolution authorized the President:

...to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of any...nation...requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism...<sup>48</sup>

During his testimony before Congress, Dulles affirmed that the administration did not think a Soviet invasion of the region was likely. He also could not identify any Arab nation "controlled by international communism", but made general connections between the Soviet Union, Egypt, and Syria.<sup>49</sup> Under casual analysis it appeared to be a dramatic but poorly thought out policy taken by Washington, to combat an unidentifiable communist threat. But Dulles' answers betrayed the inherent

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<sup>48</sup> Excerpt from Resolution 117. Quoted in Economic and Military Cooperation with Nations in the General Area of the Middle East, U.S. Government Printing Office, P.1.

<sup>49</sup> See Dulle's 7-9 JAN 1957 testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Economic and Military Cooperation with Nations in the General Area of the Middle East, 1957.



strategy of the resolution, which was no more, and no less, than an extension of the previous ten years of American regional policy.

Dulles was questioned about why the resolution referred to the threat of "internal subversion" but only dealt with "overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism". Dulles claimed it dealt with subversion in "substance" by achieving three things:

First, by reducing the fear of opened armed attack, a fear which...encourages the subversive elements within a country ....second,...it enables us to assist in military planning, so that they (Host government) will...have adequate and loyal and well equipped and adequately paid security forces...third,...is to permit economic assistance...

It was this combination that Dulles stated would provide as "complete a program against internal subversion as possible".<sup>50</sup> The first "element" helped avoid a "Czech Scenario", where Nasserist or communist forces might combine internal unrest with external pressure from either Egypt or Syria. The second and third elements, military and economic assistance, were continuations of the Two-Pillar development strategy pursued by both the British and the United States since the late 1940s. The most significant aspect regarding these two, was that the administration was not required to get congressional

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid #19, P.16.



authorization before committing American resources.

Eisenhower and Dulles requested \$200 million for economic and military programs. The money for 1957 had already been appropriated for such projects and the same amounts were requested for both 1958 and 1959. The key was not necessarily the amount, but the change in the process. Before January 1957, a Congressional committee had to approve each project on an individual basis. Not only was this time consuming, but each action risked rejection or being weakened by respective interest groups. The resolution let the administration commit funds to programs the White House considered necessary to halt the "spread of international communism", only having to justify the entire program to Congress during January of each year. This avoided potential road blocks by Israel's congressional supporters and critics of foreign spending who previously blocked or diluted such aid to Arab states. It also gave the administration a speed almost equal to the Kremlin in providing aid as a political tool.<sup>51</sup> The second pillar, that of regional military security, proved to be the aspect most modified.

American strategy was now more concerned in controlling

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<sup>51</sup> For a detailed account of the evolution of Eisenhower's Economic aid strategy and the impact of U.S. domestic legislation, see Burton Kaufman, Trade and Aid: Eisenhower's Foreign Economic Policy, 1953-1961, 1982.



the spread of the radical nationalists; than in organizing the region against a Soviet military invasion. The concept of global containment took on a regional character in the Eisenhower Doctrine, but its creators did not necessarily see the region purely in Cold War terms. The stability of conservative Arab regimes was the immediate objective, but in the interest of evolutionary development.<sup>52</sup> The survival of the status-quo was not an end in itself. Although the Administration was putting Nasser on notice, it still regarded "this nationalism as an inevitable development which should be channeled, not opposed".<sup>53</sup> Eisenhower and Dulles, while more skeptical of Nasser than before, were in fact unchanged regarding the Arab revolution. But Washington's increased responsibility for Western concerns required the administration to act on American interests, not the radical nationalists. The next seventeen months would prove that as Nasser sought to expand his role, which required political turmoil, Washington

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<sup>52</sup> The theory and assumptions predominantly adopted by the Eisenhower administration and their applications in the fight against the spread of Communism are best illustrated in Millikan and Rostow, A Proposal: A Key to an Effective Foreign Policy, 1957. It is almost identical, if not simply a continuation of earlier British and American development philosophies.

<sup>53</sup> Operations Coordinating Board Report, "Progress Report on U.S. Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East (NSC 5428)", FRUS, p. 424.



would respond to re-establish stability.

The House of Representatives passed the Eisenhower Doctrine on 30 January 1957, followed by the Senate on 5 March. While legislators changed the basic outline of the White House draft, Eisenhower and Dulles obtained their essential element.<sup>54</sup> The President could provide military and economic aid without justifying each individual requirement under the requirements of the 1954 Mutual Security Act. With the domestic actions nearly complete, the regional ramifications were about to begin. The first test of the Eisenhower Doctrine was to come in Jordan, a country usually of secondary importance to Washington. The events of April 1957, would begin a regional Cold War within the context of the global Cold War, between Cairo and Washington.

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<sup>54</sup> The final House and Senate versions were essentially the same as the original draft submitted 5 JAN 1957. The most substantive changes were: the Administration had to justify its expenditures every July, in addition to January, and that no more above the \$200 million could be spent without special approval by Congress. For adopted Resolutions, see American Foreign Policy, Current Documents, 1957, Pg. 816 and 829.



The Eisenhower Doctrine in Jordan: 1957

Prior to February 1957, Dulles was not amenable to committing American resources to Jordan. As late as 24 December 1956, the British Ambassador to Washington observed that in Dulles' view, "the brutal fact was that Jordan had no justification as a state".<sup>55</sup> Dulles was not alone in this opinion. Few observers at the time thought the kingdom would survive the social and political upheavals in the Arab East. Hussein's ability to survive however, would surpass the expectations of his allies and adversaries. Supported by resources provided under the Eisenhower Doctrine, his actions in early 1957 would establish an opposition to Nasser that had thus far eluded the American administration. The King would use a political attack against the Jordanian radical nationalists, similar to the Administration's sales strategy of the Doctrine with Congress. This stalled his opponents long enough for the King to secure his own position, achieving to what amounted to a counter-coup.

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Uriel Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Radical Nationalism (Oxford, 1989), p. 47.



Jordan: Two Concepts of Nationalism, One Country

On 15 December 1956, The New York Times carried an interview with Jordan's Premier Sulayman Nabulsi. "Jordan cannot live forever as Jordan," he proclaimed. "It must be connected militarily, economically and politically" with another Arab state, presumably Syria.<sup>56</sup> In a political meeting five days later, Nabulsi praised Nasser for thirty minutes without mentioning Hussein or Jordan.<sup>57</sup> The Premier did not elaborate on what would be his King's role in the eventual confederation. Such was the attitude of the country's highest elected official, who was also the Chairman of the national socialist party. Since the October 1956 elections, The nationalist socialists and their coalition had controlled 75% of parliament. Nabulsi's seven member cabinet included the first known communist to hold such a high level government position in the Arab world. Another member, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Abdallah Rimawi, was also secretary of the Jordanian Ba'th party.

Nabulsi's remarks came five days after he manipulated the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid #1, p. 45.

<sup>57</sup> George M. Haddad, Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East: The Arab States, Part I (University of California Press, 1971), p. 498.



withdrawal of an Iraqi army brigade from East Jordan. Iraqi, Syrian, and Saudi units had been sent during the Suez crisis to counter a potential Israeli invasion, but neither Damascus nor Riyadh had been asked to recall their forces. Nabulsi was against the presence of Iraqi troops from the start; he declared their presence illegal because Baghdad was not a signatory of the tripartite pact between Egypt, Syria, and Jordan.<sup>58</sup> Nabulsi did not explain why Saudi forces were allowed to stay, nor did he seek the King's approval. On 10 December, the Iraqi brigade and its Commander, Brigadier General Qassim, left Jordan.<sup>59</sup> Jordan's civilian government had left almost 3,000 Syrian troops within a 45 minute truck ride to Amman.

King Hussein had been forced to hold elections in October 1958. The Jordanian Ba'th and the communists had organized several demonstrations which had paralyzed his government. The organizers were supported in numbers by the socialists and

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid # 3, p. 497.

<sup>59</sup> Qassim would eventually lead the coup in Iraq on 14 July 1958 and the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq. During his units tour in Jordan he reportedly passed his intentions to stage a coup to Colonel Bizri of the Syrian army. See Haddad's, Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East, p. 544.



financed by Cairo and Saudi Arabia.<sup>60</sup> Once Nabulsi's party gained office, there was a struggle between the two elements of government: the parliament and the monarchy. The army, Hussein's source of power, was becoming increasingly political just like its counterparts in Egypt and Syria. The Bedouin units were strongly loyal to the King; however, army headquarters in Amman and units commanded and staffed by officers from the urban areas were less reliable. These elements formed the basis of Jordan's own "Free Officers", led by the Army Chief of Staff, thirty-four year old General Abu Nuwar. Only a major months before, he gained the Monarch's confidence and subsequent rank as Hussein's aide during the turbulent year of 1956. As Chief of Staff, he ensured that his own men were placed in influential military positions; simultaneously trying to lessen the resentment of the bedouin officers and growing suspicions of the King. But there was little question of Nuwar's loyalty. When the moment came to choose between the monarch or radical nationalists, Nuwar readily opted for the latter.

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<sup>60</sup> Agwani, Communism in the Arab East, p. 150. Through the end of 1956, King Saud's actions were parallel to Nasir's. This was to damage the positions of Iraq and Britain more than to enhance that of Nasir. It was not until after the Suez crisis and Nasir's soaring popularity, that Saud appears to realize Saudi Arabia was not immune to the same methods of subversion.



Prior to the October 1956 elections, the national socialists, the Ba'th, and the communists had called for the termination of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty. To replace British subsidies associated with the treaty, the Ba'th advocated economic ties with Egypt and Syria while the communist front championed the benefits of Soviet aid; neither masked their anti-monarchy sentiments. Until a greater Arab federation could be achieved, Nabulsi's socialists tolerated a constitutional monarchy. This relation worked as long as the country's direction was pro-Egypt and Syria, suspicious of Iraq, and sympathetic to the Soviet Union.<sup>61</sup> All three Jordanian parties endorsed a proposal made by Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia that they would replace the British subsidy. When the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty terminated on 13 March 1957, Hussein would rely financially on his three Arab neighbors.

Once Cairo and Damascus controlled a large portion of Jordan's budget, the balance of power would tip to Nabulsi and the cabinet. Hussein realized this and looked for assistance from the United States in December 1956, but Dulles' response was cool. The only thing the Secretary of State offered was to keep the ruler's entire request for American assistance

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<sup>61</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Radical Nationalism, p. 42.



confidential. He told the King that Washington was not happy with the direction Nabulsi was taking, and needed to see "Jordan maintain strong ties with the West if Jordan's economic needs (were) to be met".<sup>62</sup> In other words, if Hussein wanted American help, he would have to prove himself first.

On 16 January 1957, the British confirmed they would abrogate the Jordanian treaty in March. Hussein was in Cairo three days latter to sign the Egyptian-Saudi-Syrian offer, but he was also preparing to meet Dulles' requirements. On 2 February 1957, Hussein broadcasted a message without prior warning to Nabulsi. The King attacked the infiltration of communist influence in the government, labelling it as a national danger. He turned the nationalist appeal against the radicals.

...Arab nationalism is at the very present facing a peril that threatens to destroy [Arab independence]....These aim at replacing an imperialism which no longer exists...with an imperialism of a new sort...if we allow the Communist doctrine a foothold in our country, we would be loosing all our heritage as a nation...<sup>63</sup>

Though Hussein mentioned no specific names or policies, the cabinet felt compelled to reassure the public they were not

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<sup>62</sup> Dulles to Mallory, 24 DEC 1956, FRUS, p. 79.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Richard H. Sanger's, Where the Jordan Flows (Washington D.C., 1963), p. 379.



communists, simply ardent nationalists.<sup>84</sup> On 5 February 1957, security forces loyal to Hussein confiscated communist publications and films, stopped the import of Soviet and Chinese journals, and closed down the weekly publication of the Jordanian Communist Party.

Nabulsi was not a communist, but a ba'thist. He and most of his cabinet members were anti-West as a result of their nationalism more than out of affiliation with Moscow. The source of their conflict with the King was that they saw the kingdom as a British creation. In their view, there was little legitimacy for the nation let alone a throne. Hussein could expect the same from Nasser and the Syrian regime. Neither were likely to tolerate any continued form of a monarchy initially established by the British. Hussein was also capable of using the same argument against his opponents, however. By associating the radical nationalists with communism and Soviet imperialism, the King questioned their legitimacy. Hussein was creating doubt in the public as to who the better nationalist was. The King was not only a descendent of royalty, he was the direct descendent of the first generation nationalists. For the first time, a conservative nationalist was putting radical

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<sup>84</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism, p. 49



nationalists on the defensive.

The King's argument of communist imperialism not only played upon the fears of his own people, but directly lent itself to the threat identified in the Eisenhower Doctrine. Here was the communist menace, ready to swallow Jordan. He did not have to wait long for a response. On 6 February Dulles notified the American Ambassador in Amman, Lester D. Mallory, to "immediately inform (the) King that we are highly gratified...in pointing out (the) Communist menace. We strongly share his view that Communist imperialism poses primary threat to the sound development of Arab nationalism".<sup>85</sup> A new partnership was forged between Dulles and Hussein.

#### THE APRIL CRISIS

During March 1957, Amman was again the site of several mass protests. During the three-day holiday proclaimed by the cabinet, celebrating the end of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, demonstrators choked the streets of Amman denouncing imperialism and the Eisenhower Doctrine. On 27 March, Hussein met with the Turkish Ambassador. The King acknowledged the potential of American assistance and stated extraordinary developments would

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<sup>85</sup> Dulles to Mallory, FEB 1957, FRUS, p. 83.



occur soon.<sup>66</sup> On 1 April 1957, Nuwar announced Jordan could acquire Soviet arms any time it wished. The next day, the Cabinet voted to recognize the Soviet Union despite Hussein's well known opposition. The position between the King and his cabinet was becoming irreconcilable. On 8 April, the First Armored Car Regiment moved from Zarqa to Amman. Finding his palace surrounded, Hussein angrily confronted his Chief of Staff and Premier. The leaders of the Coup hesitated. Nuwar ordered the regiment to return.<sup>67</sup> On 10 April, realizing how close he had come to being deposed, Hussein dismissed the Nabulsi government.

The next challenge came during the evening of 13 April. Hussein was informed by his uncle that officers were inciting specific units in Zarqa to march on Amman while trying to send those loyal to Hussein on maneuvers in the desert. Hussein again confronted Nuwar, who expressed surprise and offered to drive to the Zarqa camp and dispel these rumors. Hussein went personally, taking Nuwar with him. On the road, they encountered Bedouin units on their way to Amman to investigate

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<sup>66</sup> Mallory to Dulles, 29 MAR 1957, FRUS, p. 89.

<sup>67</sup> Uncertainty exists whether the events of 8 April 1957, were an actual coordinated attempt to overthrow Hussein, a rehearsal, or events initiated by one or a few Free Officers. See Agwani's, Communism in the Arab East, or Haddad's, Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East.



rumors that the King had been killed. When Hussein appeared the soldiers cheered. Upon seeing Nuwar they asked Hussein's permission to kill the Chief of Staff. The King sent Nuwar back to the palace, rallied his forces at Zarqa, and ensured Nuwar's clique of officers were removed. The next morning Nuwar and his family were escorted to the Syrian border.

Early on 14 April, Hussein learned that the Syrian brigade was preparing to move towards Amman. During the night of 15 April, after receiving permission from King Saud to place the Saudi brigade under Jordanian command, Hussein informed President Quwatli that any move by Syrian troops would be opposed by force. The President told Hussein that he was sure it was only a night maneuver, but he would order his troops to their barracks immediately.<sup>68</sup> The threat of internal subversion from Hussein's own army was now minimal. The possibility of a "Czech scenario" using Syrian troops appeared to be contained. After months of acquiescing to challenges to his authority, Hussein was able to act.

In the previous years the King had few practical allies. King Saud had not yet recognized Cairo as a threat to his own monarchy. Bringing in Iraq, with its British stigma, as a

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<sup>68</sup> Sanger, Where the Jordan Flows, p. 385. All Syrian units would leave Jordan by 26 May 1957, at Jordan's demand.



partner in the expulsion of Nabulsi's government would have associated Hussein to Western imperialism. This would have mocked his self proclaimed role as the real defender of Jordanian nationalism. The King did not want to hand Nabulsi or Cairo a justification for his overthrow. By linking the radical nationalists to communist imperialism, Hussein also connected his own interests into the philosophy behind the Eisenhower Doctrine. The King, as an Arab national leader, was making an association that Eisenhower and Dulles could never credibly make in the region. Communism was just as much an imperialist threat to the Arab East as Western capitalism was perceived to be. It was the same association as the Administration's reference to international communism, but without the accusation of Cold War interests. Hussein had just made Jordan as a "vital national interest of the United States".<sup>69</sup>

#### EGYPT'S LOST OPPORTUNITY

Throughout the military conspiracies of 8-15 April, the Egyptian government appeared ambivalent regarding events in Jordan. Nasser was vacillating. Nabulsi's cabinet had

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<sup>69</sup> Department of State Bulletin, v. 36, 13 May 1957, p. 767.



threatened to resign on 1 April due to "unconstitutional conduct" by the King. Hussein had sent his own representative to Cairo, without the knowledge of Nabulsi. The purpose of the delegation was to convince Nasser that no matter what Jordan's internal composition was, Amman would stand for the regional policies of Cairo.<sup>70</sup> Nasser reportedly instructed Nabulsi not to resign, but to remain in place. Hussein appears to have cast some temporary doubt about Jordan's radical nationalists in Cairo, similar to what he did with the Jordanian people. Also, Nasser probably did not want to alarm King Saud by disposing of a fellow monarch at a time when Saudi Arabia could lean over to the Americans.<sup>71</sup> It also appears Cairo was over confident. With the odds so heavily against Hussein, Nasser probably thought he could wait. If the coup attempts failed, the revolutionary spirit would rally overwhelming crowds which would sweep Hussein away. Whatever the Egyptian leader was thinking, by the time he became more involved, it was too late.

On April 17, during a National Security Council meeting, Allen Dulles reported that American intelligence had learned

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<sup>70</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism, p. 51.

<sup>71</sup> King Saud had visited Washington during the last week of January 1957, when the Americans did their best to present Nasir as more of a threat to the Saudi monarchy than the Hashemites.



Nasser was "extremely unhappy" and "seeking every means of reversing the situation in Jordan".<sup>72</sup> The Egyptian leader was also reported to be irritated with King Saud, probably due to the Saudi military assistance to Hussein on the night of 15 April. Radio Cairo came back into full swing on 21 April with an announcement from General Hiyari. Hiyari, Nuwar's replacement as Chief of Staff, requested political asylum in Damascus. In a radio address from the Syrian capital, Hiyari claimed that the King, along with certain foreign elements, had master-minded the events of the last two weeks as part of a plot "to conspire against the independence of Jordan and ties with sister Arab countries".<sup>73</sup> The next day Jordanian radical nationalists drafted their final resolutions to the King.

The 22 April resolutions called for the expulsion of the American ambassador and army attache, rejection of the Eisenhower Doctrine, and an immediate federation with Syria. On 24 April the mob was formed and prepared to march, but a spokesman from the Foreign Ministry informed the protest leaders that the government would announce its decision regarding the Nablus resolutions on the next day. The riots were delayed.

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<sup>72</sup> Conversation between Allen Dulles and Secretary Dulles, 17 April 1957, FRUS, p. 98.

<sup>73</sup> Mallory to Dulles, 21 April 1957, FRUS, p. 100.



That night communist and ba'thist leaders were arrested and the police dissolved, their functions absorbed by the Army. The next morning, 25 April, all political parties were disbanded and martial law imposed. When the protesters tried to assemble the next day, most of their leadership was broken and their organizations declared illegal. The demonstrators were confronted by bedouin troops with blackened faces to avoid recognition should they have to fire into the crowds. There was no popular revolt in Amman that day.

It was not until Cairo came back publicly into the game and tried to force a popular revolt that Washington felt compelled to openly declare its support for Hussein. On 24 April, the Sixth fleet was dispatched to the Eastern Mediterranean under the authority of the Eisenhower Doctrine. The Resolution's applicability was a matter of confusion in the State Department up to 14 April.<sup>74</sup> On 23 April, the Secretary of State expanded the reach of the Resolution. To Dulles, the Doctrine was, "an attitude, a point of view, a state of mind". In the case of Jordan, Dulles stated the Doctrine was to help Hussein keep his country from falling "under the domination of

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<sup>74</sup> The Acting Secretary of State, in a meeting with the British Ambassador, stated that the Eisenhower Doctrine would not apply because Jordan's problems were essentially internal. There was no overt aggression from states controlled by international communism. FRUS, p. 93.



other countries which...work contrary to what the King considers the best interests of his country".<sup>75</sup> There was no mention of international communism. The Secretary was speaking of Cairo, not Moscow. Within twenty-four hours however, during a State Department news conference, international communism, not radical nationalism, became the source of the threat against Hussein.

The switch back to identifying communism as the source of instability was a justification, not an analysis. Hussein still had to establish his own credentials as an Arab nationalist. The King based his actions on saving Jordan from communism, not Egypt. He could not afford to be perceived as America's lackey. He would in fact never make an outright public endorsement of the Eisenhower Doctrine. Embracing the Doctrine was not a requirement however, containing Nasser was. During the last week of April, Dulles was also concerned that too much support would be an embarrassment to Hussein.<sup>76</sup> He preferred assisting Jordan via Saudi Arabia or other states to avoid the impression of strong Western ties. Yet, by the end of June 1957, the United States was providing \$30 million in economic and military

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<sup>75</sup> Statement by Dulles at News conference, 23 April 1957. Quoted in Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1957, p. 231.

<sup>76</sup> Phone conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, 25 April 1957, FRUS, p. 109.



aid, almost the annual sum of the previous British subsidy.<sup>77</sup>

Two-thirds of this was economic aid from Point Four funds, and all of it was administered under the less binding process of the Eisenhower Doctrine.

Hussein's victory resulted from his own actions more than the support he received from Washington, however. Washington's execution of the Doctrine and its related actions were actually anti-climatic. Hussein had already outmaneuvered and beaten his domestic opponents, although the presence of the 6th Fleet and American guarantees certainly would have to be weighed by Cairo and Damascus if they contemplated further intimidation with troops, as they had done on 15 April. The Doctrine clearly helped in terms of providing Hussein an option, however. When he appeared to have no allies, Washington had given him support with conditions. Hussein had to gain control on his own. Once he displayed his determination to establish his authority, the United States reciprocated with support. Ironically, in only four months, Hussein went from having no future to being the first to deal a real set-back to Nasser, removing some of the aura surrounding the force of radical nationalism.

Hussein's success was also a model victory of sorts to

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<sup>77</sup> Excerpts from News Conference Comments by the Secretary of State, 2 July 1957, Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1957, p. 233.



Washington. On the surface, the strategy behind the Eisenhower Doctrine appeared to be working. The spirit of the Resolution was in fact to assist efforts against subversion and not for the United States to do it alone. By taking limited actions, the Administration had supported a "re-birth" of conservative Arab nationalism in Jordan, without igniting the emotions of Suez. Unfortunately, the White House was about to forget some of the basic lessons it had learned. As the end of 1957 approached, the inherently reactive and defensive nature of the Eisenhower Doctrine would be replaced for a proactive policy in Syria. The results would not be as positive as in Jordan.



#### IV

#### Syria 1957: Forgetting Lessons Learned

King Hussein's success in the April 1957 proved that the power of the radical nationalists could be tempered. For the next three months Hussein continued to attack publicly the regimes in Cairo and Damascus, labeling them "false nationalists". The King argued that close ties to Moscow and the atheism of communism threatened the foundation of the Arab religious culture. He also contended there was no such thing as Egyptian and Syrian neutralism, and that they had sided with Moscow in the Cold War.<sup>78</sup> Radio Cairo countered with accusations of its own against Amman, but Nasser himself remained quiet. With Nasser's momentum apparently stalled, Washington began to concentrate almost exclusively on what Dulles perceived to be the other face of radical nationalism.

When formulating the Eisenhower Doctrine, Dulles focused on Syria, not Egypt, as the most likely to become a Soviet satellite in the Arab East. He was concerned that the alliance between the Communist and Ba'th parties would lead to the latter

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<sup>78</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism, Chapter 5.



being manipulated and consumed by international communism. Because of Syria's central location, it could prove to be a greater threat to Western interests than Nasser. Dulles' plan to deal with such a situation was to "pinch off" the country from Soviet control. If the country was not contiguous to the Soviet Union like Eastern Europe, Dulles did not believe Moscow would exert itself to maintain Syria as a satellite.<sup>79</sup> In May 1957, Washington began planning to eliminate the perceived Arab communist threat.<sup>80</sup>

The White House approach to Syria concentrated on combatting international communism more than radical nationalism. The American administration displayed little of the respect it had previously given to Nasser's revolution when developing the Eisenhower Doctrine. This would prove to be the Administration's critical mistake in applying the "attitude" of the Doctrine. By September 1957, Washington would create its own Suez crisis and tip the initiative back to Cairo. Ironically, Nasser would feel compelled to finish what Dulles started in Syria, but for very different reasons.

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<sup>79</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Lloyd, 10 DEC 1956, FRUS, p. 73.

<sup>80</sup> Little, "Cold War and Covert Action", p. 72.



Syrian Radicalism: The Ba'th, the Communists, and the Army

Dulles was not alone in his assessment that Syria could easily become a Soviet satellite. The American Ambassador in Damascus wrote to Dulles on 17 May 1957:

Syria has willfully become [a] base for anti-American propaganda, leftist penetration of labor, sabotage and Communist activity throughout [the] area...[conservative] opposition shows no sign of competent and courageous leadership...

These interpretations were not only a product of the current administration in Washington and its appointees. Syria had long been the center of revolutionary political action, attracting the attention of the Truman administration as well. For almost ten years, the United States unsuccessfully tried to promote conservative Syrian politicians. Washington's inability to simultaneously satisfy Israeli and Arab concerns however, led to the same predicament the White House experienced with Egypt during 1955 and 1956. A key difference between Egypt and Syria though, was that no leader with the charisma and power of Nasser emerged in Damascus.

Between 1949 and 1955, Syria's government suffered from chronic instability, having been overthrown six times by military coups. By 1956, the Syrian Army was split in two

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<sup>81</sup> Moose to Dulles, 17 May 1957, FRUS, p. 618.



primary blocs: older conservative officers with social roots in prominent Damascene commercial families and younger officers from religious minorities with predominantly rural backgrounds. Inspired by Nasser's success in Egypt and disillusioned with Syria's traditional politicians, the younger Syrian officers were drawn to the goals of radical nationalism. Some turned to communism as an alternative, but a larger number were more attracted to the doctrine of "Arab-Socialism" as defined by the Ba'th party.

The Syrian Ba'th combined two popular political themes circulating in the Arab world during the 1950s. The first of these was socialism and its promise to reform the existing social structure. The second was that of "Pan Arabism", or the unification of all Arab lands into one greater Arab nation.<sup>82</sup>

As in Jordan, both parties found a common domestic enemy in the conservative politicians. Yet throughout the early 1950s, the Ba'th could not win a majority in Syria's elected government. Most of Syria's strong merchant families distrusted socialism. The Ba'th and the Communists allied to combine their strength against the conservative politicians. The radical nationalists recruited and achieved political influence through military and

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<sup>82</sup> Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples (Cambridge, 1991), p. 404-407.



civilian officials in key government positions.<sup>83</sup> They limited themselves to foreign affairs, which was less alienating to the commercial traditions of the country. Their foreign policy did find popular support, promoting similar and sometimes identical policies as Egypt: neutrality in the Cold War, eliminating Israel, and increasing political autonomy from the Western bloc.

Nasser's growing popularity enhanced the status of Syria's own radical nationalists and their ability to control the direction of the country's foreign policy. During the Suez crisis, the White House became alarmed by the possibility of Soviet fighter aircraft being stationed on airfields near Damascus.<sup>84</sup> On 17 January 1957, the Joint Chiefs confirmed that Syria had received 24 MIG-15 fighters, 130 T-34 battle tanks with approximately 100 Soviet technicians.<sup>85</sup> In the May 1957 elections, the Ba'ath and Communist Parties coordinated their campaign efforts. Using the anti-Western feelings generated by the Suez crisis, they scored their first success in general elections. The Soviets also contributed by encouraging many

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<sup>83</sup> Jaber, The Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party: History, Ideology, and Organization, Chapter 3.

<sup>84</sup> National Security Council notes, 6 NOV 1956. Quoted in Little, p. 68.

<sup>85</sup> JCS memorandum, 17 JAN 1957. Quoted in Little, p. 69. In subsequent reports the number of technicians would be reduced to about 50.



hard line communist candidates to withdraw their names, allowing more Ba'thists or independent socialists to capture the vote.<sup>86</sup> The Syrian political left captured half of the civilian government, but the previous years of military political involvement eroded the strength of the civilian institutions. Real power lay in the hands of the Syrian Army, particularly its intelligence chief, Major Abd al-Hamid Sarraj.

With a monopoly on Syrian intelligence and the internal security apparatus, Sarraj was in a very powerful position.<sup>87</sup> He was a strong supporter of Nasser, but extended his influence through the Ba'th.<sup>88</sup> Following the May elections, Sarraj established a Revolutionary Command Council modeled after Egypt's. All but one of the eight members of the council were associated with the Ba'th or Communist Parties. The goal of the council was not to immediately seize the government, but to use it as a front, and control the country through its civilian contacts.<sup>89</sup> It was this complexity of relationships that

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<sup>86</sup> Lesch, Syria and the United States, p. 113.

<sup>87</sup> Sarraj's position as director of the country's security services was equivalent to the authority of the Directors of the American CIA and FBI combined.

<sup>88</sup> Patrick Seale, The Struggle For Syria (London, 1965), p. 245.

<sup>89</sup> Lesch, Syria and the United States, p. 116.



alarmed Washington:

The [Revolutionary Command Council] is reportedly receiving support from Nasser. It plans to dissolve parliament, purge the Army of rightist elements, and to declare an immediate union with Egypt...the USSR has promised<sup>90</sup> support...with troops and material, if needed...

The pattern of the Army's ties to the Ba'th and Communist Parties were parallel to Dulles' concerns regarding international communism. The previous distinctions Dulles and Eisenhower made in Jordan regarding Nasser, radical nationalism, and communism were becoming increasingly difficult to identify. In Washington's opinion, Syria appeared to be transforming into a Soviet client state.

The American administration felt that events in Syria portrayed a more advanced stage of subversion and that international communism could very well prevail over the Nasserists and the Ba'thists. On 29 April, Eisenhower stated that if Syria could be stabilized, "America would come a long way in an effort to establish peace in that troubled area".<sup>91</sup> Establishing peace entailed removing the Syrian radical nationalists, now almost synonymous with the communists in the

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<sup>90</sup> Memorandum for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Possible Leftist Coup in Syria", 17 JUN 1957. Quoted in Lesch, p. 116.

<sup>91</sup> Eisenhower, Waging Peace, p. 193-194.



eyes of the Administration. The problem that Eisenhower and Dulles faced, was that the communists were not yet in control. An American attempt to reverse events in Damascus would equate to an attack on the Ba'th, Arab radical nationalism, and ultimately Nasser.

American Intervention: "Suez in Reverse"

On 30 July 1957, the Syrian Defense Minister, Khalid al-Azm, signed a \$500 million economic and military agreement with Moscow. This apparently convinced the White House that events in Damascus had gone too far. On 12 August, Sarraj expelled Howard Stone and two other American Embassy employees on the grounds that they were plotting to overthrow the government and replace it with a conservative regime. The plot, code named "Wappen", was consistently exposed to Sarraj by Syrian officers whom Stone and his operatives attempted to recruit.<sup>92</sup> The Syrian Revolutionary Command Council used the incident to arrest or dismiss conservative and moderate political opponents. The moderate Army Chief of Staff was replaced by General Bizri.

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<sup>92</sup> For descriptions of the American operation code named "Wappen", see Lesch's, Syria and the United States, Eveland's, Ropes of Sand, and Seale's, Struggle for Syria.



generally believed to be a communist sympathizer.<sup>93</sup> With a failure in the covert arena, Eisenhower and Dulles modified their efforts to "pinch off" the Syrian left by encouraging conservative Arab countries to pressure Damascus.

The purpose of using Washington's Arab allies was to try to create a situation where the Eisenhower Doctrine could be used. Unlike Jordan, there was no established leader who would request American assistance or to declare that the country was being subverted by communism. Due to the complexity of relations between the various radical nationalist factions, Washington could not identify a clear scenario which would justify the Doctrine. Dulles advised Eisenhower on 20 August 1957, not to assert that Syria was controlled by international communism, because the situation was "still confused" and the United States did "not yet know how far along this pattern has yet gone".<sup>94</sup> The wording of the Eisenhower Doctrine had provided flexibility in responding to the Jordan crisis. In Syria, it was serving as a straight jacket. The Ba'thists and the Army were quick to issue public statements and press

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<sup>93</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, 36.7-57, 3 SEP 1957, "Developments in the Syrian Situation", FRUS, p. 675.

<sup>94</sup> Dulles to Eisenhower, 20 AUG 1957, FRUS, p. 641. The pattern Dulles referred to was that of the method used by international communism to gain control of a country.



conferences to point out they were not communists. If Washington intervened they would look like the British and French at Suez. If the Doctrine could not be implemented due to Syrian domestic circumstances however, there was a chance it could be initiated by outside forces.

On 24 August 1957, Eisenhower dispatched Loy Henderson, Deputy Under Secretary of State, to Istanbul for a meeting with representatives of Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. The purpose of the meeting was provide the material and funds for an intervention initiated and conducted by one of the three Arab participants.<sup>95</sup> Eisenhower believed that combined military pressure from Jordan, Syria, and Iraq would force the Syrian regime to collapse, if not overthrown by its own people.<sup>96</sup> The Administration hoped to rally Syrian conservatives to try a counter-coup, similar to what transpired in Jordan, or entice Syria to become militarily engaged with one of the conservative Arab states. Once engaged, the United States could respond to the conservative nation's request for assistance under the auspices of the Doctrine. Despite American and Turkish encouragement, none of the Arab monarchies would participate.

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<sup>95</sup> Dulles to Henderson in Turkey, 23 AUG 1957, FRUS, p. 650.

<sup>96</sup> Eisenhower, Waging Peace, p. 198.



Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia agreed that the Syrian regime was undesirable, but none were willing to openly take on the radical nationalists and face the potential political repercussions at home.

The weaknesses of America's conservative Arab allies were exposed by the crisis. One problem was a mutual distrust between Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>97</sup> None of them wanted to initiate such a provocative action against Syria with the possibility of being abandoned by the other two in the middle of a crisis. This would leave the provocateur isolated, appearing to be the lackey of American imperialism. This dilemma actually materialized when King Saud tried to use the crisis to bolster his own prestige in the Arab world.

With Nasser apparently out of the picture, still quiet after the "Jordan" affair, Saud tried to assume regional leadership by pursuing a diplomatic solution. On 10 September 1957, the Saudi Ambassador in Damascus said Riyadh would "spare no effort to support, back, and aid" Syria if it was the target of aggression.<sup>98</sup> The two Hashemite kings were forced to quickly follow Saud or be left alone on the side of the United States.

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<sup>97</sup> Embassy in Turkey to Department of State, 3 SEP 1957, FRUS, p. 670.

<sup>98</sup> FBIS, 11 SEP 1957. Quoted in Lesch, Syria and the United States, p. 174.



Saud's actions proved to be premature. He alienated Eisenhower and degraded the appearance of an Arab conservative alliance. Saud was also mistaken in his perception that Nasser was doing nothing. Events soon proved that Nasser had his own plans.

The Administration's second try to bring down the Syrian left had failed. Washington would escalate its action again by encouraging Turkey to bring pressure on Damascus, using similar tactics it had hoped the Arab monarchies would use. The Syrian crisis extended into October 1957, ultimately leading to open Soviet threats against Turkey in the Kremlin's support of Damascus. For Moscow, this produced a similar propaganda victory as the one achieved during the Suez crisis. Although Eisenhower and Dulles eventually backed out, they accomplished what the British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan described as "Suez in reverse".<sup>99</sup> The conservative states of the Arab East were forced to distance themselves temporarily from the United States to avoid mass protests of American pressure on Damascus. Even Hussein felt compelled to switch his own propaganda themes from challenging the nationalist credibility of Egypt and Syria, to that of the Israeli threat, not a theme of particular benefit

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<sup>99</sup> Harold MacMillan, Riding the Storm, 1956-1959 (New York, 1971), p. 279-280. MacMillan further commented that, "If it were not serious (referring to the crisis)...it would be rather comic".



to the United States.<sup>100</sup> Despite the failure of the Eisenhower administration's actions, its objectives were not lost. Nasser would recognize the threat to his own position and remove the Syrian Communists; but Cairo's ultimate objectives were far from Washington's.

### Egypt Takes Control

Nasser was quick to take advantage of the situation that Washington and Riyadh provided in September 1957. While King Saud was advancing his solution to the Syrian crisis, Nasser was formulating his own. On 11 September 1957, General Bizri, (who had commanded the Syrian brigade which threatened Hussein in Jordan), and Sarraj, now a Colonel, met with Nasser in Cairo to plan Egypt's military intervention in Syria.<sup>101</sup> On 13 October Egypt landed 2,000 troops at Latakia. The message to the Arab world was clear. While Saud talked about resolving the Syrian

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<sup>100</sup> Lesch, Syria and the United States, p.179. In his work, Lesch implies that the Eisenhower administration's actions in Syria were representative of Washington's entire approach to the Arab East during the late 1950s. While this author agrees with many of Lesch's conclusions specifically regarding Washington's policy towards Syria in 1957, to treat the Syrian crisis as the norm is an over simplification of Eisenhower and Dulles' approach to Nasser, radical nationalism, and the Arab East.

<sup>101</sup> Seale, The Struggle For Syria, p. 306.



crisis, Nasser was taking action. The military significance of 2,000 troops was minimal if in fact Syria were to be invaded by an outside force. The political victory however, re-affirmed that Nasser was the leader of Arab nationalism in the Arab East. There was little question, despite Hussein's rhetorical challenges and Saud's professed leadership, that Nasser remained the hero of the Arab revolution.

Cairo's intervention surprised everyone but its planners. Nasser, like Dulles, was becoming increasingly alarmed with the growing power of the communists in Syria. He and his Syrian allies had been unaware of the depth of Syria's economic agreement with the Soviet Union, negotiated by Khalid al-Azm in late July.<sup>102</sup> In August 1957, Nasser promised the Syrian populist party leader that Egypt would not allow Syria to fall victim to a Communist Party take over.<sup>103</sup> Both the Ba'th and the Communist Parties had achieved what they wanted in the country, eliminating the Syrian conservatives from constituting a domestic political threat. The Ba'th Party leaders were now beginning to perceive that they had been used by the communists

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<sup>102</sup> British Embassy-Beirut, 19 AUG 1957, FO 371/128228. Quoted in Lesch, P. 167.

<sup>103</sup> Lesch, Syria and the United States, p. 182.



who would soon become too powerful for the Ba'th to fight alone.<sup>104</sup> The Ba'thists in the Syrian Army went to Cairo for support, which they found in Nasser.

Despite his own concerns regarding the communists, Nasser conveyed to the United States that it was over reacting. During a discussion with the American Ambassador in Egypt on 1 September 1957, Nasser commented that the situation in Syria, "is much better, much calmer" and "there is a greater feeling of security".<sup>105</sup> He claimed Syria would not sacrifice its independence to the Soviet Union. Nasser also recommended that Washington should "go in for a bit of psychiatry" and deal with Syria more "gently". Nasser's own actions on 11 September with Bizri and Sarraj however, betray the sincerity of his own advice to Washington. As the United States and the Soviet Union were debating in the United Nations over the future political orientation of Syria, Nasser was preparing to handle the crisis his own way.

Nasser's actions over the next four months were based more on maintaining his own leadership in the Arab East, than fear of communism itself. In November of 1957, the Syrian Ba'th began negotiations with Nasser to unify the two countries. Membership

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<sup>104</sup> Jaber, The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, p. 44.

<sup>105</sup> Hare to Dulles, 1 SEP 1957, FRUS, p. 665.



to the Syrian Communist Party was increasing in popularity. The communists were becoming more demanding in their partnership with the Ba'th and pushing for closer ties with the Soviet Union.<sup>106</sup> The Ba'th was beginning to fear that it was losing control of the communists, something they had always discounted. A communist regime in Syria would not necessarily threaten Nasser in Egypt, but it could threaten his position as the leader of Arab radical nationalism. For years the socialist and communists had been the main political parties comprising radical nationalism, but did not fully control a government as Nasser did. If the Communist Party dominated Syria however, could Nasser continue to get the same level of Soviet support without competing with the Syrian Communists for it?

In December 1957, Nasser approached the American Ambassador in Cairo and requested that the United States keep its "hands off Syria for a period of three months". Citing the need to counter the communists, he wanted to ensure that Washington did nothing to further antagonize anti-Western feelings.<sup>107</sup> On 1 February 1957, Egypt and Syria announced the formation of the United Arab Republic. The growing popularity of the communists was absorbed by Nasser in the euphoria

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<sup>106</sup> Seale, The Struggle For Syria p. 316-317.

<sup>107</sup> Hare to Dulles, 11 DEC 1957, FRUS, p. 745.



surrounding what appeared to be the first step towards Pan-Arabism. The Egyptian leader accomplished what Dulles had tried four months before: keeping Syria from falling deeper into the Soviet sphere of influence. At the same time, Nasser achieved his highest level of popularity, surpassing that of the Suez crisis.

Nasser did not waste his moment. Although Washington and Egypt had finally found common ground in opposition to Arab communism, they arrived there with different objectives. Dulles and Eisenhower sought stability, but could not find an effective way to apply their Doctrine in Syria. It had been designed to counter subversion, not create it. Nasser sought expansion of his power through revolution and viewed American efforts a threat to his source of strength. An Egyptian official summarized Cairo's attitude to the American Ambassador:

The main difference between the United States and Egypt was their attitude towards nationalism. Egypt felt that nationalism among the masses was the driving force which would prevail, whereas the United States elected to deal with governments which...were out of touch with basic reality, such as Lebanon, Jordan, and even Saudi Arabia...<sup>108</sup>

Nasser was miscalculating American desire to maintain the status quo, however. In Lebanon, American policy would prove that it emphasized stability more than maintaining conservative regimes.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid #30. Remark contained in note 2 of message 1426.



V

Lebanon: Containing Nasser's Revolution

The formation of the United Arab Republic signified the most dramatic turning point in the evolution of radical nationalism. At Suez, Nasser stood firm and survived the combined force of Britain, France, and Israel. In February 1958, he went one step further by agreeing to unite with Syria. To the Arab world, Nasser appeared to be dismantling the political boundaries imposed on it by the European empires. His partnership with the Syrian Ba'th made Egypt the center of two prominent political themes in the Arab East during the decade, Arab socialism and Pan Arabism. Cairo was now the undisputed capital of the Arab revolution.

The reactions of conservative Arab states were mixed. Jordan and Iraq put aside their mutual distrust long enough to try to form a similar union, the Arab Federation, on 14 February 1958. It paled in popularity to the United Arab Republic. King Saud paused, as Nasser did after the Jordan affair, and attempted to minimize the damage to his prestige brought on by his lost bid for leadership in the Arab East. The Syrian Communists were forced underground by the Nasserist-Ba'thist



alliance in Damascus. In Lebanon, the revolutionary forces began to stir with new energy that would ultimately bring the struggle between Cairo and Washington out in the open.

Subversion in Lebanon, sponsored from Cairo, would be more active and overt than it was in Jordan during 1957. International communism, which dominated the conversations of the White House in late 1957, almost disappeared from Eisenhower and Dulles' vocabulary in their discussions regarding Lebanon. America would take its most dramatic actions to contain radical nationalism, but with little reference to the Eisenhower Doctrine. The Lebanese crisis was about to expose the consistency behind the American approach to the region and assumptions on which it was based.

#### Chamoun and the Rebellion: Setting the Stage

The focus of the American-Egyptian confrontation in Lebanon revolved around President Camille Chamoun. Elected in 1952, he was then seen as a source of stability in the Lebanese political arena. His reputation was that of a patriot and a nationalist. As Arab nationalism split into its respective radical and conservative paths in the mid 1950s however, Chamoun proved to be more along the lines of the first generation



nationalists. His Maronite background and roots from one of the country's more cosmopolitan families clashed with the increasingly socialistic radical nationalism. He refused to break relations with Britain and France during the Suez crisis. In early 1957, Chamoun was the only leader in the Arab East to openly embrace the Eisenhower Doctrine.<sup>109</sup> Neither event ingratiated him with Nasser, nor with the Lebanese political opposition.

The domestic opposition was a mixture of religious and ethnic groups with various political agendas, but united in their opposition to Chamoun. The beginning of their revolt can be traced to the May 1957 elections. Chamoun's supporters in the Lebanese parliament won a clear majority, apparently by rigging the elections better than the opposition.<sup>110</sup> It appeared to many leaders, across the political spectrum, that Chamoun was purposely trying to destroy their bases of political power.<sup>111</sup> Chamoun's intentions to use his new parliament to amend the constitution and secure for him a second term, confirmed the opposition's suspicions. The anti-West sympathy

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<sup>109</sup> Malcom Kerr, "The Lebanese Civil War", Chapter 4 in The International Regulation of Civil Wars (London, 1972), p.69.

<sup>110</sup> Eveland, Ropes of Sand, p. 250-3.

<sup>111</sup> Hudson, The Precarious Republic, p. 44 and 52.



generated by the American-Syrian crisis, followed by the formation of the United Arab Republic, also contributed to the popular Lebanese apathy towards to the Chamoun regime.

Months of limited violence in late 1957 and the first months of 1958 attracted American attention. Dulles took an early position of regarding the next Presidential elections in Lebanon an internal matter. Despite reports that certain rebel factions were receiving support from across the Syrian border, Dulles expressed concern that Chamoun's bid for a second term was also affecting Lebanon's internal stability. In March 1958, Dulles conveyed to Chamoun that America would adopt an attitude of "aloofness to this internal Lebanese problem".<sup>112</sup> Dulles' response to Chamoun came when Washington and Cairo were making small signs of reconciliation to each other.

The United States received the formation of the United Arab Republic cautiously, but also with some comfort because it perceived that Nasser had over extended himself. The American Ambassador in Egypt, Raymond Hare, suggested to Dulles that if Cairo "did not rashly embark on a hostile campaign against us or our friends", it would then be advisable to take on a more reconcilable approach to Nasser.<sup>113</sup> Over the next 90 days

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<sup>112</sup> Dulles to McClintock, 18 MAR 1958, FRUS, p. 17.

<sup>113</sup> Hare to Dulles, 10 FEB 1958, FRUS, p. 425.



American-Egyptian diplomatic approaches, though cordial, reflected early efforts to find a common ground on which each other's interests could be met. Nasser, through the Egyptian Ambassador in the United States, professed that Egypt had no intention of attacking her neighbors. Dulles stressed that Egypt had nothing to fear from America.<sup>114</sup> By early May however, it became evident that Nasser's radical nationalism had not yet played out.

#### The Lebanese Rebellion

The rebellion itself was touched off on 8 May 1958, by the assassination of a journalist, Nasib Metni, widely known for his criticism of the Chamoun government. The rebel leadership blamed the government. The government accused the rebels.<sup>115</sup> The combatants of both sides operated in militia, divided along religious and political factions. Despite the many differences

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<sup>114</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Ambassador Hussein of Egypt and Dulles, 3 MAR 1958, FRUS, p. 432.

<sup>115</sup> The identity and motivation of the assassins is still contended. In Revolution and Military Rule in the Middle East, p. 419-20, Haddad cites a conspiracy by Chamoun's political opposition, claiming they in fact killed Metni in order to spark the rebellion. The majority of studies on the Lebanese crisis cite the opposition claim. No hard evidence currently exists to draw firm conclusions.



of the insurgents, they repeatedly proclaimed their common objective; the immediate removal of Chamoun. The Army, commanded by Gene ' Chehab, did not enter the fight except to protect key government facilities. Chehab, being as neutral as he could be, feared the Army would dissolve along the same religious and political lines of the militia, if it entered the fighting on the side of the regime. Unable to get his Army to act, Chamoun began appealing to the United States for support. He promptly accused the United Arab Republic as the perpetrator, claiming it was supporting the rebels.

Evidence did exist regarding the regime's claims. In early May 1958, Border guards discovered arms and explosives in the car of the Belgian Consul from Damascus. This was followed by a Syrian raiding party, which crossed the border and killed five Lebanese border guards.<sup>116</sup> American intelligence assessed that the rebels, both Christian and Moslem, were receiving weapons, supplies, "volunteers", and policy guidance from Egypt, through Syria.<sup>117</sup> On 16 May 1958, in reference to the Metni assassination, Nasser proclaimed, "The conscience of the people of Lebanon was shocked because it knew the assassins

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<sup>116</sup> Kerr, "The Lebanese Civil War", p. 75.

<sup>117</sup> SNIE 36.4-58, FRUS, p. 94.



and criminals".<sup>118</sup> On 13 May 1958, Chamoun informed Robert McClintock, the American Ambassador in Beirut, that he might request foreign troops within 24 hours.<sup>119</sup> Washington clearly believed Nasser was assisting the rebels, but Dulles and Eisenhower were reluctant to move into Lebanon.

#### Negotiations with Nasser and the Eisenhower Doctrine

During meetings in the White House on 13 May 1958, it was quite clear that Dulles was not enthusiastic about applying the Eisenhower Doctrine. He spent more time outlining why the United States could not invoke it.<sup>120</sup> Opposite to his broad interpretations of the Doctrine's applicability in Jordan during 1957, Dulles stated that it could not be invoked unless it could be proven that the United Arab Republic attacked Lebanon and that Cairo was under the control of international communism. Dulles obviously knew that the requirement of international communism would not be proven. After the Syrian crisis and the formation of the United Arab Republic, was the "spirit" of the

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<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Haddad, p. 420.

<sup>119</sup> McClintock to Dulles, 13 MAY 1958, FRUS, p. 41.

<sup>120</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Dulles and Eisenhower, 13 MAY 1958, FRUS p. 46.



Doctrine not as strong?

The message sent back to Chamoun on 13 May, displayed the American reluctance by adding three more interdependent points: Lebanon would have to file a complaint with the United Nations regarding Cairo's support to the rebels, America would receive the public support of at least some Arab states, and that Chamoun would not seek a second term.<sup>121</sup> The Administration was informing Chamoun that he did not possess a blank check regarding American assistance. On 15 May 1958, Dulles instructed Ambassador Hare in Cairo to approach Nasser. The message was simple: America was committed to uphold Lebanon's "independence and integrity".<sup>122</sup> Washington was also convinced Cairo was supporting the Lebanese rebels. If Nasser was sincere in his earlier statements regarding better relations with the United States, he would use his influence to moderate the subversion.

On 20 May 1958, Nasser met with Hare and offered to mediate with the rebels. He stated three primary points: amnesty for the opposition, that General Chehab become the Prime Minister, and for Chamoun to disclaim any intention of modifying

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<sup>121</sup> Dulles to McClintock, 13 May 1958, FRUS, p. 49.

<sup>122</sup> Dulles to Hare, 15 MAY 1958, FRUS, p. 55.



the constitution, but serve his full term.<sup>123</sup> On 27 May 1958, the Lebanese government announced on Radio Beirut that the government would not introduce any constitutional amendment allowing Chamoun a second term. This however, would be the most conciliatory gesture on the part of the Lebanese government. Negotiations continued between Nasser's representative Muhammad Heikal and Ambassador Hare, but Chamoun considered the talks a "sellout".<sup>124</sup> Cairo could not, or did not, get the Lebanese rebels to stop demanding Chamoun's immediate resignation. Attacks against Chamoun from radio Cairo also continued unabated. By June 1958, Dulles also became increasingly reluctant to push Nasser's proposal on Lebanon and contribute to what he described as "placing a seal of respectability upon Nasser's intervention".<sup>125</sup> By 13 June 1958, it was evident that the negotiations were leading nowhere. Nasser, reported Heikal, felt he was "being played for a sucker".<sup>126</sup> The next day, a fierce rebel offensive began in downtown Beirut.

The Eisenhower administration was caught not only between Beirut and Cairo, but within its own philosophy as well. The

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<sup>123</sup> Hare to Dulles, 20 MAY 1958, FRUS p. 69.

<sup>124</sup> McClintock to Dulles, 6 JUN 1958, FRUS p. 98.

<sup>125</sup> Dulles to Hare, 5 JUN 1958, FRUS p. 92.

<sup>126</sup> Hare to Dulles, 16 JUN 1958, FRUS, p. 452.



reluctance of the American administration showed that it was not willing to intervene simply to maintain the status quo in Lebanon. Dulles made it very explicit to Chamoun, that the Lebanese government could not depend on American troops to settle what Washington considered an internal political matter.<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, Dulles and Eisenhower felt they could not let Nasser achieve his aims, or those of his Lebanese allies, by insurrection. Washington would not blindly support the status quo, nor would they stand aside and let Chamoun be taken out by rebellion. By not containing radical nationalism in Lebanon, the only country in the Arab East which had embraced the Eisenhower Doctrine, the United States would destroy its own credibility as an ally.

Following a meeting on 27 June 1958, Hare reported that Nasser still sought to find a negotiated settlement regarding Lebanon and could not understand America's unwillingness to follow Egypt's proposal. On 3 July, Hare reported he had been informed that Nasser wanted Washington to give him six months to demonstrate his good intent.<sup>128</sup> On 7 July 1958, Nasser

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<sup>127</sup> Dulles to McClintock, 23 MAY 1958, FRUS, p. 75.

<sup>128</sup> Nasir discussion contained in 27 JUN 1958, message from Hare to Dulles, FRUS, p. 458. Ambassador Designate Kamel discussion of 3 JUL 1958, contained in message from Hare to Dulles, FRUS, p. 461.



departed the country for an Eastern European tour. The rebellion in Lebanon continued unabated consuming much of Washington's regional focus. Joint Anglo-American planning to intervene militarily, begun as early as November 1957, was essentially completed and ready to be implemented. The most significant events of late June and early July however, did not occur in Lebanon, but in Jordan and Iraq.

On 29 June 1958, a second plot against King Hussein's regime was uncovered. While Nasser had been professing his intent to help stabilize Lebanon, evidence was building that the plot had been engineered by Syria's Colonel Sarraj, now a key official of the United Arab Republic.<sup>129</sup> On 1 July 1958, the Iraqi government agreed to send one brigade to bolster Hussein, at least until Jordan could sort out the conspirators in its Army. The brigade commander, General Arif, had other plans. As his unit passed through Baghdad on 14 October 1958, his troops overthrew the Iraqi government and killed the royal family. General Qassim, arrived shortly after to assume leadership of the country.<sup>130</sup> As the details of the revolution and the

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<sup>129</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radical Nationalism, p. 87.

<sup>130</sup> Khalidi, Rashid, "The Impact of the Arab Revolution on the Arab World", in Fernea and Louis', The Iraqi Revolution of 1958, p. 111-13.



loyalties of its conspirators would unfold in later years, it became evident that Cairo was not aware of the Iraqi coup. Pictures of Nasser however, quickly filled Baghdad street front windows and Cairo's political themes were echoed in mass protests celebrating the coup. To Dulles and Eisenhower, there was probably little doubt regarding the origins of the coup.

#### Intervention in Lebanon

Within hours of the Iraqi coup, Chamoun requested American forces.<sup>131</sup> United States Marines began landing on 15 July, but not to destroy his opposition, but only to ensure that he completed his lawful term. The White House also received an immediate message from Saudi Arabia, urging the administration not only to stabilize the Arab East, but to reverse the coup in Iraq.<sup>132</sup> The British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, recommended that Britain and the United States intervene in Iraq and possibly Syria, essentially to secure the entire Arab East by force.<sup>133</sup> Eisenhower and Dulles would assist British troops

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<sup>131</sup> McClintock to Dulles, 14 JUL 1958, FRUS, p. 208.

<sup>132</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Radical Arab Nationalism, p. 92.

<sup>133</sup> William B. Quandt, "Lebanon 1958, and Jordan 1970", Chapter 7 in Force Without War, p. 252-53.



in Jordan with logistical support, but nothing further. The Administration was not intent on re-establishing Western hegemony over the Arab East. Dulles and Eisenhower were instead focused on the Arab revolution under Nasser's control, which they believed was challenging the global credibility of the United States.

Eisenhower had already discounted the Soviets intervening in the Lebanese crisis, providing the American response was limited and did not threaten Egypt or Syria.<sup>134</sup> Dulles however, reasoned that American actions towards Nasser's challenge in Lebanon, would have far reaching global implications. He argued that by moving into Lebanon, the United States would make future confrontations less likely, because it would retain its allies, and give the Soviet Union less encouragement to sponsor subversion in other areas.<sup>135</sup> Regionally, Eisenhower and Dulles saw intervention as the lesser of two evils. Dulles reflected, "we thought we had a third way out in Lebanon, but with events in Iraq, that is no longer

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid #25, p. 227.

<sup>135</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Dulles and Eisenhower, 14 JUL 1958. FRUS, p. 213.



available to us".<sup>136</sup> The Administration recognized it would antagonize anti-West sentiments not only from Suez, but also now from the American-Syrian crisis. However, if the Administration did nothing, there was general agreement that Nasser would eventually dominate the area, with the backing of the Soviet Union. The need not to openly challenge Nasser, a major tenant of the Eisenhower Doctrine, was secondary to maintaining American global credibility.

It was during the Lebanon crisis that Dulles' opinion of Nasser and his threat to the United States apparently crystallized. In a 25 July 1958 letter to Eisenhower, Dulles wrote:

Nasser counts as "friends" those who help him to achieve his ambitions...[He] would be glad to get help from us as well as from the Soviet Union, but that would...lead him to merely move on, and not to moderate his ambitions...[he is not] interested in consolidating what he has, but in going from one political success to another...

Dulles highlighted the policy dilemma of the United States:

...This is what makes the problem so difficult. We are basically wholly sympathetic with Arab nationalism if it means a constructive and productive unity of the Arab peoples. Unfortunately, Nasser's brand of nationalism does not seem to be leading to that...<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid #27, p. 210. The third way out was clearly Hare's negotiations in May and June with Nasir, which came to be seen by Dulles as rewarding subversion more than discouraging it.

<sup>137</sup> Dulles to Eisenhower, 25 JUL 1958, FRUS, p. 464.



Dulles perceived Nasser was being deceitful in his dealings with the United States. Nasser did appear to be playing a double game with the United States. His communications with Washington regarding Syria in December 1957, his overtures of better relations with Washington through March and early July of 1958, followed by events in Jordan and Iraq, surely convinced Dulles that Nasser could not be trusted and his objectives were counter to those of the United States. Nasser's actions upon hearing of the American intervention in Lebanon proved Dulles' assessment to be correct.

Nasser was in Yugoslavia when he learned of the coup in Iraq and the American decision to intervene in Lebanon. Instead of returning to Cairo, he travelled to Moscow to consult with the Soviet leadership. Unknown to the American administration at the time, Nasser wanted Soviet intervention similar to what had transpired in the Syrian crisis, by putting Russian troops on the Turkish border. Khrushchev told him the Soviet Union was "not ready for confrontation" with America.<sup>138</sup> Nasser argued for more support. Khrushchev promised maneuvers on the Turkish border, but reminded Nasser that it is only a maneuver. "Don't

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<sup>138</sup> Mohammed Heikal, The Cairo Documents (New York, 1973), p. 132.



depend on anything more than that".<sup>139</sup> Khrushchev also recommended to Nasser that he alter his tactics and rely less on insurgency to obtain Cairo's goals. To this Nasser did not agree, countering that the Soviets' assessment of the Arab countries was "unrealistic" and that "nothing could be changed without military interference" in other states.<sup>140</sup>

When Nasser left for Cairo on 7 July 1958, he appeared to be in a no-lose situation. American intervention could fuel his propaganda machine and popular image, if Washington did nothing it was only a matter of time before Chamoun would fold. That the intervention seems to have taken Nasser by surprise displays his level of confidence in controlling events in the Arab East prior to 14 July 1958. Perhaps he had come to believe that he was not Washington's third option, but its only option, if Eisenhower and Dulles wished to avoid a Suez scenario. Upon his return however, there were British troops in Jordan and American Marines in Lebanon, but he also found American objectives in Lebanon closely aligned with his own. Washington was not seeking a solution which supported Nasser's expansionism, but it was sympathetic to Arab nationalism.

On 16 July 1958, Eisenhower dispatched Under Secretary of

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid # 30, p. 134.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid #30, p. 144.



State, Robert Murphy to Lebanon. As Murphy's visits with various Lebanese leaders progressed, he consistently stressed that American troops were not in the country to solely support Chamoun.<sup>141</sup> The rebel leaders seemed surprised to hear this, stating they were under the impression the United States was there to hold up Chamoun. Had Nasser failed to inform the rebels of all of Dulles' stated objectives during his mediation efforts? Within a week of the intervention and Murphy's initial negotiations with rebel leaders, the violence subsided. On 31 July 1958, elections were held in the Lebanese parliament, which determined that Chehab would succeed Chamoun. Another objective of Murphy's diplomacy was to assure Cairo and Baghdad that they were not targets of the intervention and that foreign troops would depart once the situations in Lebanon and Jordan were calm.

Murphy's diplomacy appeared aimed at pacifying the Lebanese rebels before going to Cairo. Once in Cairo Murphy did not bargain, he simply informed Nasser what the United States was going to do. Facing the return of American and British forces in the Arab East, combined with doubts of Soviet support, a second failed coup attempt in Jordan, and a stalled

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<sup>141</sup> Robert Murphy, Diplomat Among Warriors (New York, 1964), p. 404-07.



insurrection in Lebanon, there was little Nasser could do but go along with the American intervention.

In terms of containing the Arab revolution in Lebanon itself, the actions of the United States were successful. The 14,000 American troops would be completely withdrawn by 28 October 1958, followed by the last contingent of British troops from Jordan on 2 November. Although Lebanon's many social and economic problems would resurface a decade later, Chehab proved capable of rebuilding the authority of the Presidency that had been weakened by the 1958 Civil War. In addition to achieving a political settlement in Lebanon, King Hussein was bolstered, at least morally, when the General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution in the name of the Arab League calling for all states in the Arab East to "abstain from any action calculated to change established systems of government".<sup>142</sup> Though not specifically stated, this no doubt applied not just to Egypt, but to all powers to include the United States.

The resolution was still more a victory for Washington than Cairo. In a sense, one of the primary objectives of the Eisenhower Doctrine, minimizing subversion, had just been adopted by the United Nations. It was no longer the Washington

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<sup>142</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism, p. 95.



containing Cairo, the goal itself was now being given recognition on an international scale. The Lebanese intervention did not diminish the popularity of Nasser and radical nationalism, but it did force into the open and condemn the method of expansion on which Nasser relied. The pattern of Suez was broken.

The American administration's assessment of Nasser during late 1956 and early 1957, also proved to be justified. Lebanon did show Nasser that he could not depend on the Soviet Union for unlimited support and that he had to beware of Moscow's interests. This did not fully materialize however, until 1959. The revolution in Iraq brought in a second Arab leader, General Qassim, who did not intend to subjugate himself to Cairo. To counter his growing Nasserist opposition in Iraq, Qassim allied with the Iraqi Communists who reached a level of power and influence that Dulles always feared. Qassim then established his position to compete for Soviet aid, something Nasser had precluded in Syria, but was powerless to stop in Iraq. By 1959, Nasser was publicly quarreling with both Moscow and Baghdad, while beginning a new dialogue with Washington.



### Conclusion

The reaction of Eisenhower and Dulles to events in the Arab East illustrate a consistency in their adherence to the Two-pillar philosophy behind Anglo-American policy: stability and security. The objective of stability focused on channeling the revolutionary process in the area. The Eisenhower administration was sympathetic to radical nationalism's goal of political autonomy from previous decades of Western imperialism. Washington also advocated increased democracy and economic development, assuming the two together would enhance social and political stability. The method in which the Arab revolution progressed however, ran counter to the second policy pillar of security. As the revolution became more socialistic in character and Nasser's willingness to export it more pronounced, the objectives of Cairo and Washington became more antagonistic towards each other.

For Eisenhower and Dulles, security was achieved by keeping the Soviets away from the oil supplies in the Persian Gulf. Nasser however required Soviet support and the revolution to maintain his prestige and power. Dulles' fear of international communism, coupled with Nasser's requirement of



expansion, put Cairo and Washington on a collision course. It was a conflict of interest which the American administration realized would have to be allowed to take its course. To challenge radical nationalism was to challenge Nasser, and likely result in another Suez scenario. To avoid this, the White House developed the Eisenhower Doctrine. It was simultaneously an open challenge to Moscow, as well as a veiled method of containment directed against Nasser.

The Doctrine was also a practical tool designed to achieve the two objectives of stability and security. In Jordan, it proved the most successful. The Doctrine provided the resources for Hussein to use to secure his position. In Syria, the Doctrine proved useless as an offensive policy, particularly when it became obvious that the Syrian radical nationalists were the intended target. The American failure in Syria was not by fault of the Doctrine however, but in Eisenhower and Dulles equating the ba'athists with the communists. In Lebanon, the Doctrine was not applied. Dulles dismissed its applicability as early as March 1958. By the time of the Iraqi revolution, the Administration was not as concerned with concealing its intentions to contain Nasser, as much as it was in stopping his sponsorship of the Lebanese subversion.

By July 1958, the American leadership perceived that the



relation between Nasser's revolution and the Soviet Union, had evolved to a point where it threatened the global credibility of the United States. This is perhaps the source of Eisenhower's statement, "behind everything was our deep-seated conviction that the Communists were principally responsible for the trouble" in Lebanon.<sup>143</sup> This contrasts sharply with Under Secretary Murphy's own conclusion, that communism "was playing no direct or substantial part in the insurrection".<sup>144</sup> Eisenhower was most likely speaking of Nasser's connection to the Soviets. He never considered Nasser a communist, but Cairo's objectives were parallel to those of Moscow. Both desired instability; Nasser required it for expansion and the Soviets saw Nasser pulling the Arab East away from the West. Washington consistently pursued stability. It is around this fundamental difference that the actions of the Eisenhower administration in the Arab East can best be understood.

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<sup>143</sup> Eisenhower, Waging Peace, p. 266.

<sup>144</sup> Murphy, Diplomat Among Warriors, p.450.



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THESIS

AMERICA AND THE CONTAINMENT OF ARAB RADICAL  
NATIONALISM: THE EISENHOWER YEARS

by

Thomas A. Dell

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## Introduction

Hours before committing Marines to intervene in the Lebanese civil war during July 1958, President Eisenhower reflected on the general Arab attitude: "the trouble is that we have a campaign of hatred against us, not by the governments but by the people" and "the people are on Nasser's side".<sup>1</sup> This perception was neither profound nor new in the thinking of Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Both men were aware of the general hostility America's intervention could generate. Almost two years earlier, during November 1956, when the United States rebuked Britain at Suez, Dulles had written:

I could not see any end to the situation that might be created if the British and the French occupied the canal...They would make bitter enemies of the entire population of the Middle East....

Everywhere they would be compelled to maintain themselves by force and...their own economy would be weakened virtually beyond repair...The Soviet Union would reap the benefit of a greatly weakened Europe and would move into a position of predominant influence in the Middle East....

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Douglas Little's, "Cold War and Covert Action: The United States and Syria, 1945-1958", Middle East Journal, Winter 1990, Vol. 44, #1, p.79.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen's, Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences (Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 201-02.



Had America's policy changed drastically in only twenty-one months to the point where it was committing its own Suez crisis?

In Lebanon, Eisenhower and Dulles knew they were opposing the very force which had eaten away at the British position, a force which they understood in terms of its strength and weaknesses. The radical nationalists' goals of independence and autonomy from previous decades of Western imperialism found sympathetic ears in the White House, appealing to America's own historical values.<sup>3</sup> Both Washington and Cairo shared mutual objectives of: blocking the internal spread of communism, establishing strong political and economically independent states, and ensuring defense from outside threats. The means to obtaining these goals would prove to be different however. Nasser's would pursue a revolutionary path, while Washington advocated an evolutionary process in the transformation and defense of the Arab East.<sup>4</sup> The emergence of Nasser and radical nationalism throughout the area required a modified approach to secure Western interests.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Packenham, Liberal America and the Third World, Political Development Ideas in Foreign Aid and Social Sciences (Princeton, 1973), Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> The Arab East is defined in this paper as Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.



Dominant in this new approach was Dulles' concern with the weaknesses of Nasser's brand of nationalism. Following his 1953 trip to the region, Dulles accurately assessed Arab hostility to Western imperialism, their fear of an expansionist Israel, and the United States' awkward position as its benefactor. In his observations lay the direction United States' foreign policy was to pursue. Testifying before a Congressional Senate committee Dulles stated, "Let none forget that the Kremlin uses extreme nationalism to bait the trap by which it seeks to capture the dependent peoples".<sup>5</sup> Dulles believed radical nationalism could also be a potential-Soviet weapon to be used in disrupting if not destroying Western strategic interests.

America's reaction to this potential weakness would lead to the Eisenhower Doctrine, new commitments to the stability of Jordan, the American-Syrian crisis, and ultimately to the containment of the nationalist revolution in Lebanon and Jordan during 1958. It would also prove to be one of the most misinterpreted elements of the Eisenhower era. Although Eisenhower and Dulles would achieve their ultimate objectives, their policy would be considered by many observers to be a

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<sup>5</sup> "Six Major Policy Issues": Address by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to Congress upon his return from the region, 1 JUN 53.



failure. Citing the Administration's over emphasis on stopping communist subversion, critics would contend that Dulles in particular defined regional characters and events within the context of the global Cold War. Eisenhower and Dulles in fact pursued the opposite, trying to keep the global Cold War from coming into the Arab East.



1

Anglo-American Interests and the Character  
of Radical Nationalism

In 1952, two types of Arab nationalism were firmly established in the Middle East. The conservative version included older statesmen who had led the new Arab countries after World War I. In many ways they carried over the existing social order and political practices from the Ottoman era. Political elites dominated quasi-parliamentary states by means of favoritism, rigged elections, and pay offs. Power flowed along pre-nineteenth century class lines. "Feudal" style land owners, established merchant families, and various tribal or sectarian leaders monopolized political power and national resources through the government machinery.<sup>6</sup> The conservative nationalists were remnants of the elite who had colluded with the French and British empires. They were generally pro-West and key players in representing Western interests in their national policies.

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<sup>6</sup> Numerous sources exist on this topic. See Marwan Buheiry, The Formation and Perception of the Modern Arab World, A.H. Hourani, Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay and A History of Arab Peoples, and Kamal Salibi, A House of Many Mansions; The History of Lebanon Reconsidered.



The social character of the conservative nationalists also encouraged the political orientation of the next generation. Oil and Western aid increased national wealth, but little benefit filtered down to the classes below the elite. Both British and American leaders recognized the unstable ground on which their influence was based. In 1949, Britain's Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin wrote:

The old regimes which we were forced to support, would not stand up to revolutionary conditions and would be swept away. These regimes were greedy and selfish and had not allowed any of the wealth which they had made out of the war and out of the oil to benefit the poorer classes. If we continue to support them we should be blamed in the event of the Communists succeeding in turning the people of the Middle East against us....

This observation was followed in 1952, by America's Secretary of State Dean Acheson:

The Middle East presented a picture that might have been drawn by Karl Marx himself- with the masses disinherited, ...no middle class, a small and corrupt ruling class pushed about by foreigners who sought to exploit priceless resources, whether oil or canal. Was there ever such an opportunity to invoke inherent xenophobia to destroy the foreigner and his system and substitute the Communist solution?

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Wm. Roger Louis, The British Empire in the Middle East (Oxford, 1984), p. 604.



Anglo-American solidarity on a policy of sitting tight offered no solution, but was like a couple locked in warm embrace in a rowboat about to go over Niagara Falls. It was high time to break the embrace and take to the oars....

The direction in which both the British and the Americans began moving in the early fifties was toward economic development. Both governments looked at their own histories and hoped to achieve long term social stability in Arab countries through economic prosperity.<sup>8</sup> Their processes were evolutionary and optimistic. It would require decades to accomplish what had taken centuries in their own societies.<sup>10</sup> It also required numerous foreign technicians and progressive political leaders, the latter being excluded from the political process by the conservatives. Many of these younger leaders also did not share the Western patience, optimism, or strategic concerns.

Ensuring the flow of Middle East oil was the basic goal of Anglo-American policy in the region. Europe's economic recovery after World War II depended on this resource. In Eisenhower's

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Dean Acheson, Present at Creation (New York, 1969), p. 600.

<sup>9</sup> The American and British philosophies regarding economic development can be found in Michael Ionides, Divide and Lose, Burton Kaufman, Trade and Aid, and Millikan and Rostow, A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy.

<sup>10</sup> Egey Sangmuah, "Eisenhower and Containment in North Africa, 1956-1960", MEJ, Winter 1990, Vol. 44, #1, p. 78.



words it ranked, "almost in equal priority with an adequate supply for ourselves".<sup>11</sup> Maintaining the flow of oil rested upon two strategies: First, stability of Arab regimes friendly to the West, and second, their physical security from an external Soviet military threat. Stability entailed strong popularly supported governments which would stand-up against domestic revolutionary forces. Both the United States and Britain devised programs of economic aid and development in an attempt to eliminate wide spread poverty, considered the root cause of discontent and a breeding ground for communist sympathies. Military security was to be obtained through assistance in arms supplies and regional alliances, such as the Baghdad Pact, designed to contain the expansion of the Soviet Union into the Middle East. But the implementation of both strategies required a degree of control or influence over the domestic and foreign policies of the Arab countries. This in itself increased the hostility to the Western powers by the younger nationalists, a hostility Dulles sought to avoid.

Before the Suez crisis the United States had walked a fine line between sympathy for Nasser's revolutionary objectives and providing full support for her British allies. In a 1953

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<sup>11</sup> Legislative Leadership Meeting, 8 MAY 56, Box 2, Legislative Meeting Series, Eisenhower Papers.



testimony to Congress, Dulles said:

...without breaking from the framework of Western unity, we can pursue our traditional dedication to political liberty. In reality, the Western powers can gain, rather than lose, from an orderly development of self government....<sup>12</sup>

In short, the United States supported the independence goals of Nasser's generation, providing they did not threaten the orderly transition of power. But when the evolutionary process appeared to be threatened as in Iran during 1953, or Syria in 1958, Washington did not hesitate to contemplate or actually use covert operations to influence domestic events.<sup>13</sup> Yet, the American official mind of the late forties and early fifties was also generally negative and sometimes openly hostile to what it perceived as the continued imperial behavior of Britain. Immediately after the Egyptian revolution, the United States sought to co-opt Nasser into the West's cause in the Cold War.<sup>14</sup> The British believed this reflected American naivete' and inexperience in the region.

Robin Hankey, the British embassy Charge'd'affairs,

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<sup>12</sup> "Six Major Policy Issues": Address by the Secretary of State to Congress on 1 JUN 53.

<sup>13</sup> Little, "Cold War and Covert Action", p. 51-55.

<sup>14</sup> Early American efforts at bringing Nasir into the Western alliance are described in Wilbur Eveland, Ropes of Sand, (W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1980)



described American efforts in Egypt as "starry eyed". He particularly singled out the American Ambassador, Jefferson Caffery, for playing the middle between Egyptian nationalism and British imperialism. Sir William Strang, Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office reported: "There seemed to be people in the U.S. embassies who were dominated by the old anti-colonial feeling to the extent they seemed to think the British were always wrong".<sup>15</sup> Clement Attlee contributed to the British complaint in his open article in Foreign Affairs 1954, reminding the Americans of Britain's long term experience with the Arabs versus the United States whose status to them was one of "newcomers".<sup>16</sup> The primary British criticism was that America was supporting forces which threatened to de-stabilize the region. In short, who would control the road to orderly development, self government and thus, stability and security? Would nasserist radicals and "non-alignment" be given partnership in the responsibility for the economic and strategic security of the West? The British thought not.

The "progressive" or radical nationalists in the region matured not only during the time of the British and French

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted Louis and Owen, Suez 1956, p. 60.

<sup>16</sup> Clement Attlee, "Britain and America, Common Aims, Different Opinions", Foreign Affairs, Vol 32, No. 2, JAN 1954.



mandates, but during the rise of Soviet Russia and spread of European socialism. The egalitarian precepts of socialism found fertile ground among elite and middle class social critics, creating an environment in the 1950's where an intellectual usually meant a Marxist and at least a democrat.<sup>17</sup> It was particularly appealing to young military officers, many with origins in the lower middle income and poor agrarian classes.

By 1954, the Soviets, like their Czarist predecessors, looked at the Middle East with renewed interest. It was filled with opportunities to score regional victories against the United States in the global competition of the Cold War. Moscow also provided the radical nationalists with an alternative source of economic and military resources. External support, usually necessary to tip the balance of power in internal struggles, was no longer based on collusion with Western imperial powers alone. The Soviet Union was also an economic model of sorts for the internal transformation of Arab societies. Its rapid industrialization and modernization presented what appeared a much better alternative to the decades of evolutionary growth under the old "feudal" classes envisioned

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<sup>17</sup> Abdul Salaam Yousif, "The Struggle for Cultural Hegemony", Chapter 10 of Louis and Fernea, The Iraqi Revolution of 1958: The Old Social Classes Revisited (London, 1991), p. 176-77.



in the Anglo-American models.

### Conflicts in National Interests

After consolidating his power and securing a British evacuation treaty by late 1954, Nasser began to focus on more regional issues. The Czech Arms Deal in 1955, and merely surviving the Suez invasion in 1956, flaunted the new terms of independence in the face of the old imperial powers. Internal policies geared toward land redistribution, nationalization of industry, and plans to increase economic autonomy signaled a change in the social order, not just a break from imperialism. The policy of non-alignment became the stated foreign policy of the new Egypt. While it was not an absolute embrace with the Soviet Union, it was a strong symbolic rejection of dependence or alignment with the West which had served as the "evil force" in the radicals mobilization of the people. The Czech Arms deal greatly irritated Washington, but Nasser's inability to deal with Israel led to a break in the White House's tolerance.

Israel was the largest problem in the Egyptian-American relation. The Arab frustration and hostility to the Jewish State was initially absorbed by the British. But as the British Empire retracted and the role of the United States grew, so did



the difficulty of reconciling Washington's support of Israel to the Arab world. Israeli security interests made it impossible for Washington to fully meet those of the Arabs. If the weapons purchases were not blocked by political lobbying, pro-Israel representatives in congress insisted on sending American advisors with the such aid.<sup>18</sup> For Nasser, the return of Western military personnel was as irreconcilable as re-establishing relations with Britain.

Washington attempted to reduce the negative affects of its Israeli connection by launching the Anderson peace mission in January of 1956. A resolution between Egypt and Israel could, in Washington's eyes, at least achieve cordial relations with the radical nationalists. Nasser's reaction to the proposal was simple and prophetic. Upon realizing the American plan entailed Egyptian recognition of Israel he said, "I could never do that. I'd be assassinated!".<sup>19</sup> Eisenhower's reaction was much deeper.

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<sup>18</sup> Although the Mutual Security Act of 1954 required U.S. advisors accompany arms to ensure the terms of their intended usage, similar shipments went to other countries, including Israel, without advisors.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in H.W. Brandis, The Specter of Neutralism: The US and the Emergence of the Third World 1947-1960, p. 260-62. In Waging Peace, p. 185-89, Eisenhower describes the actions of both the Egyptians and the Israelis regarding Israeli withdrawal from positions in Gaza, taken during the February 1955 raid. Although both sides dragged their feet on a potential settlement, Eisenhower centered the blame on Nasir after he moved his administrators back into Gaza, apparently in violation



He identified Nasser as the "primary stumbling block" towards a greater Arab-Israeli peace settlement which Washington needed to achieve stability in the Arab East.<sup>20</sup> But Nasser could never compromise on the Israeli issue and maintain his spreading popularity and political influence. The Administration wanted to appear neutral in a dispute where the Israelis and radical nationalists were absolutely polarized. When America was trying to align the Near East against the Soviets in the context of the Cold War, the Arab-Israeli dispute left no middle ground by the antagonists very own "with us or against us" mentality.

Nasser's foreign policy also threatened the basis of American strategy. The Czech arms deal enabled the Soviet Union to jump over the Northern Tier states compromising the Baghdad Pact. This broke the pillar of security in the Anglo-American strategy, giving Soviets military advisors access into Egypt and later Syria. Egypt's acceptance of Soviet funding and technical assistance to build the Aswan dam threatened the second pillar, economic development. Washington always had a sense of superiority in her economic resources. They were used as a large carrot for developing nations to follow the Western line.

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of the negotiations, after months of diplomacy by American representatives.

<sup>20</sup> Robert H. Ferrell, The Eisenhower Diaries, p. 319.



But Moscow began economic aid, coupled with less restrictive payment terms in late 1954, threatening America's self perceived monopoly on development.<sup>21</sup> By the end of 1956, Nasser not only rid himself of the British presence, but expanded his sources for foreign economic and military assistance. Egypt's "positive neutralism", the basis of Nasser's foreign policy success and regional popularity, was also the key justification to his own domestic political stability.<sup>22</sup> The American administration saw it as a practical political move on Nasser's part.<sup>23</sup> But when America's relation with Israel was added into the equation, Egyptian neutralism quickly leaned towards the Soviet Union.

By March 1956, it became apparent to the Administration that Nasser would not be co-opted to support American interests. Eisenhower began to identify Nasser himself as a threat:

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<sup>21</sup> Kaufman, Trade and Aid, Chapter 4.

<sup>22</sup> Hrair R. Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasir: A Study in Political Dynamics (Albany, N.Y., 1971) p. 40. Throughout 1955, as Nasir's foreign policy successes increased, internal Egyptian opposition to his regime decreased.

<sup>23</sup> H. W. Brandis, "What Eisenhower and Dulles Saw in Nasser", American-Arab Affairs, #17, Summer 1986. Also, in Brandis, Specter of Neutralism, parts I and II, the author concludes that neither Dulles or Eisenhower were hostile to neutralism providing it did not run counter to U.S. interests.



A fundamental problem is the growing ambition of Nasser, the sense of power he has gained out of his associations with the Soviets, his belief that he can emerge as the true leader of the entire Arab world...

Because of this, I suggested to the State Department that we begin to build up some other individual...in the thought that mutually antagonistic personal ambitions might disrupt the aggressive plans that Nasser is evidently developing...<sup>24</sup>

Eisenhower and Dulles did not see him as a Soviet stooge, but neither could they confidently determine his basic political orientations. Nasser was his own man, but for how long? The Administration began to look to the conservative Arab leaders to rally a pro-West bloc of Arab states.<sup>25</sup> The global strategy of the Cold War was being applied at the regional level. Nasser was to be isolated and his revolution contained. This would require Washington to enter the under currents of Arab politics at a time when the foundations of these regimes foundations were dramatically changing.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia were aligned against Iraq's bid for regional Arab leadership. The Saudi position in 1956 was based on historical and contemporary considerations. Traditionally at

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Brandis', Specter of Neutralism, p. 323.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid #19. Eisenhower's choice as an alternative to Nasir would be King Saud of Saudi Arabia. According to Neff, Warriors at Suez, p.317, American organization of Arab states in opposition to Nasir began in October 1956.



odds with the Hashemite monarchies of Iraq and Jordan, King Saud wished to contain Iraqi aspirations of being the leader of the Arab states. The Iraqi, Saudi, and Egyptian governments competed for regional predominance and at times outright control, of Syria and Jordan. There was also friction between Saudi Arabia and Britain. The Saudis challenged British efforts to control the Gulf in the 1920s. In 1955, after a two year dispute and Saudi occupation, the British took the Burami Oasis. King Saud countered with support to tribal leaders threatening the British position in Yemen.<sup>28</sup> Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt attacked the Iraqi alliance with Britain as remnants of imperial control.

The United States was strategically aligned with Britain, yet a regional proponent of Riyadh. It was also ironic in that it was Saudi oil that Washington sought to secure, primarily for Western European use. While Iraq had her patron, Saudi Arabia was being courted by America. Egypt had yet to confirm her global partner. Past experience and Anglo-Iraqi relations excluded Britain. Border problems with Israel excluded the United States. But the Suez invasion and Moscow's subsequent

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<sup>28</sup> The clash of national, regional and international interests regarding American-Saudi and Anglo-American interests and relations are addressed in Davis Lesch's, Syria and the United States: Eisenhower's Cold War in the Middle East (Westview Press, 1992), p. 129-32.



support provided Nasser the impetus to move closer to the Soviets. Such a move was also not inconsistent with Egypt's internal policies.

Following Bandung, socialist dogma became more frequent in Nasser's speeches. Throughout 1955, capitalism came under increasing attack by the government.<sup>27</sup> The Egyptian constitution of January 1956, institutionalized a mixed socialist-capitalist economy.<sup>28</sup> After its publication, some Communist Party members were released, although the Egyptian regime remained suspicious of the Party. With the nationalization of the Canal and the beginning of the Suez crisis, Nasser mobilized all the forces he could. The Egyptian Communist Party praised Nasser's actions for moving Egypt's revolution to a "higher plane" which they contended was possible by the economic and political support of a "reinvigorated" socialist camp.<sup>29</sup> With the Tripartite attack in October, more left wing critics of the regime were released from confinement and used to organize and fight in Port Sa'id. By the end of Suez, many of the Egyptian radical left were out of prison.

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<sup>27</sup> For discussion of anti-capitalist measures, see Charles Issawi, Egypt in Revolution, p. 52-3.

<sup>28</sup> Dekmejian, Egypt Under Nasir, p.127.

<sup>29</sup> M. S. Agwani, Communism in the Arab East (India, 1969), p. 80.



being incorporated into government ministries, and establishing party contacts in other Arab countries.

The left wing political parties of the Arab East comprised the majority of the radical nationalists and grew in popularity during the 1950s. Two of the most important would be the Ba'th Socialist Party and the Communist Party. The Ba'th was strongly anti-West. It considered Western imperialism to be the cause of contemporary Arab divisions, the existence of Israel, and the perpetuation of the old social status quo. Its founder, Michael Aflaq, was also the author of Pan-Arabism, advocating the unity of Arab states into one nation. The Ba'th and Communist parties were not instantly successful. They did not control the government bureaucracies or satisfy the skepticism of the commercial classes in regards to domestic policies. The Ba'th and the communists would overcome this handicap by allying themselves against the conservatives, a practice which increased their power and eventually their suspicions of each other. As the Arab East became increasingly anti-West, the left would capitalize on their Soviet contacts, declaring political neutralism in the Cold War.

Nasser was also willing to use the Cold War rivalry to his advantage, which alarmed both Eisenhower and Dulles as early as 1955. Egypt's increasing socialism during 1956, added to



suspicious in the White House that Nasser was slowly becoming entrapped by Soviet advisors who would subvert and dominate affairs in Egypt. Washington's concerns about Nasser, were the mirror image of the radical nationalists about Western advisors. Yet Dulles still sought to "avoid any open break which would throw Nasser irrevocably into a Soviet satellite status" and provide him "a bridge back to good relations with the West".<sup>30</sup> Despite Nasser's growing estrangement from Western interests, Dulles was reluctant to force an open confrontation. This was based off American observations during Suez, and popular Arab reaction towards Britain and France.

Washington however, was in the process of inheriting primary leadership and responsibility to pursue stability which entailed containing the spread of Egypt's revolutionary spirit. Dulles and Eisenhower needed a means to confront and contain Nasser, without appearing to be purposely targeting him. The American domestic and regional Arab forces that the Administration had to contend with would result in one of the most misunderstood policies of the Eisenhower era.

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Louis and Owen's, Suez and its Consequences, p. 191.



Radical Nationalism and the Eisenhower Doctrine

One of John Foster Dulles' primary points throughout the Suez crisis of 1956, was to avoid any action that would further enhance the prestige of Nasser. The Anglo-French-Israeli intervention had precisely the impact he feared. Allen Dulles, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, concluded that the primary result of the invasion was a "unanimous revulsion" and "revival of age-old hatred of Western imperialism and colonialism" in the Arab peoples.<sup>31</sup> The joint attack swelled regional outrage against the West and elevated Nasser's popularity. The Suez crisis also greatly diminished Britain's capability to promote Western influence. As Iraq would soon prove, close association with London was now a serious political liability for an Arab government.

The Administration saw itself now as being primarily responsible for Western interests and the security of moderate regimes in the Arab East. The American strategy remained the same; to achieve stability. With Britain's influence reduced, Washington needed a policy change. Fearing expanding subversion

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<sup>31</sup> Memorandum of meeting with legislative leaders, 9 NOV 1956, Legislative meeting series, Staff secretary records. Quoted in Brands, The Specter of Nationalism, P. 280.



sponsored from Moscow or Cairo, the White House wanted a means to actively confront both. The result of the Administrations efforts became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. The most well known function of the Doctrine, or Resolution 117, was to put the Soviet Union on notice that the United States considered the Arab East a vital American interest. Another equally vital function was to stop Nasser's expansion, without igniting Arab emotions similar to those that exploded during the canal invasion. It is this second function in which the Eisenhower administration planned to channel and contain Arab radical nationalism.

Little changed regarding the American assessment of Soviet tactics. Washington believed that the two primary objectives of the Kremlin were to; "undermine Western political and military power in the area" and "weaken the West economically and strategically" by reducing its access to oil. The Administration considered direct military action in the area by Russia a low probability.<sup>32</sup> The focus of Eisenhower and Dulles sharpened on Egypt and Syria as the principle instruments of instability. Nasser was a political problem due to his mass popularity and willingness to use it against pro-West Arab

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<sup>32</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate 11-10-56, "Soviet Actions in the Middle East", 29 NOV 1956. Foreign Relations of the United States, p. 355. (Referred to hereafter as FRUS)



regimes. Syria was increasingly perceived as becoming a Soviet satellite, also opening up "greater political and subversive opportunities" in other Arab nations.<sup>33</sup> The White House's distinction between Nasser's nationalism and what it considered a more classical Soviet supported subversion in Syria was subtle, yet significant in the manner American power would be projected.

Nasser was not considered a stooge of Moscow. The problem was that his popularity transcended national boundaries and could inspire similar revolutions in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, or even Saudi Arabia. While Nasser's could easily mobilize support for a revolution in another Arab country, there was no guarantee he could control the results. Within the instability of a revolt or coup, Washington feared the Arab communists would gain the initiative over the Nasserists, seize the government, and pave the way for Soviet domination.<sup>34</sup> Dulles perceived a

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid #2.

<sup>34</sup> Though not specifically stated, Dulles appeared fearful that Syria and Egypt could cause a regional "Czech Scenario". During his 7 JAN 1957, testimony to the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, Dulles described his impressions of the Czechoslovakian crises in 1948. Dulles felt the country submitted to a Communist Party take over because of Russian troops massed on the border at the time. The Czech peoples fear of invasion, particularly when no other power sought to counter the external Soviet Threat, was the principle reason the subversion was successful. See P. 13-14, Economic and Military Cooperation with Nations in the General Area of the Middle East.



pattern of planned coercion from the Kremlin. Moscow would first provide military and economic aid. They would then ensure the aid was controlled by Soviet sympathizers in the target country, providing the individual with powerful resources. Eventually these resources would be used to submit the country to international communism, controlled from Moscow.<sup>35</sup> Dulles believed Nasser and his desire to "fulfill his role" would create conditions the Kremlin would exploit.

Syria appeared to be such a situation. Throughout 1955 and most of 1956, conservatives struggled against an uneasy alliance of the socialist Ba'th Party and the communists for control of the parliament. The Suez crisis and subsequent exposure of a British-Iraqi coup attempt, seriously undermined the popularity of the conservative Syrian politicians.<sup>36</sup> Particularly after Suez, any radical challenge to a conservative government was likely to generate large public support simply by espousing anti-West positions. As of December 1956 however,

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United States Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1957.

<sup>35</sup> Dulles to Eisenhower, 20 AUG 1957, FRUS, P.641.

<sup>36</sup> Lesch, David W. Syria and the United States: Eisenhower's Cold War in the Middle East, Chapters 5 and 6. See also, Abu Jaber, The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party. For discussion of British-Iraqi intrigue in Syria during 1956, see Little's "Cold War and Covert Action", Middle East Journal, Winter 1990, Vol. 44, #1.



neither the socialists nor the communists could gain supremacy over the other. Each used the imperialist threat as a political platform to rally domestic support. In trying to outdo each other, they increased the country's economic and military ties to the Soviet Union. This was precisely the pattern Dulles feared. When Nasser's popularity was added to the force of anti-Western sentiments, the potential dangers of Washington projecting its own regional interests doubled.

Eisenhower and Dulles needed to more actively support pro-West regimes, but could not appear to be directly challenging Nasser and his "progressive" Arab nationalism. This concern was reflected in a State Department planning document recommending a new regional approach. The Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs listed the "ambitions of Nasser" as the first of three factors behind Soviet penetration of the region. Reducing Nasser's "power and influence" was the first of four requirements considered necessary for a new American program to succeed. Yet in order to mobilize support from other Arab countries, the Bureau concluded "our actions will be largely self defeating if they create a general impression that our objective is to directly overthrow Nasser".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Paper prepared by the Dept of State Near Eastern Policy Planning Staff, "Program to Counter Soviet Penetration of the Middle East", 5 DEC 1956. FRUS, p. 383.



The American dilemma was clear. Nasser was the immediate threat to Western interests, due to the popularity behind his social as well as political revolution. But specifically identifying him as a policy target risked creating popular Arab reaction against the United States. It would also make it difficult for conservative Arab leaders to request American assistance without being associated with a foreign threat to the Arab nationalist hero. Yet pro-West Arab nations, in and out of the Baghdad Pact, were also calling on the White House to clarify its position in the region.<sup>38</sup> Eisenhower, Dulles, and the primary staff in State and Defense perceived the need to act rapidly. If not, moderate Arab regimes would be forced to seek a middle ground with Nasser and the Soviets to ensure their own survival.

#### Searching for a Means to Apply the Doctrine

Since 1955, the Baghdad Pact served as the principle

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<sup>38</sup> In addition to countries of the Baghdad Pact, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia were also seeking stronger assurances of United States resolve to support. See memorandum, "Notes on Presidential-Bipartisan Congressional Leadership Meeting", 1 JAN 1957. FRUS, p. 434.



instrument for demonstrating Western power and resolve. Britain had been the primary Western power in the Pact, due to consistent American hesitation to become a full signatory.<sup>39</sup> On 4 December 1956, despite the intensification of anti-British feelings in the region, the American Secretary of Defense recommended to Eisenhower that the United States formally join the Pact. Of the principle reasons, Secretary Wilson stated: "to fill the political and military vacuum" created by Britain's decline as a result of Suez, to "reinforce the firm support of the U.S." to the collective security of regional conservative states. This would presumably "demonstrate to the Soviet Union" the resolve of the United States to "protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity" of the Arab states.<sup>40</sup> The recommendation noted the probable negative reactions that such a move would generate in the Arab world; but it also treated them as secondary to the requirement of sending an immediate warning to the Soviets and assurance to regional allies.

A second proposal, generated in the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs under William

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<sup>39</sup> William Stivers, America's Confrontation with Revolutionary Change in the Middle East (St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 12-13.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Secretary of Defense (Wilson) to the President, 4 DEC 1956. Eisenhower Library, Staff Secretary Records. FRUS, p. 372.



Rountree, reached Dulles' desk the next day. This proposal rejected Baghdad Pact membership because most Arab nations associated it with an extension of British control. Could the United States afford to step in to the British position in the Pact and not expect to be regarded as a new power in an old game? Not in Rountree's opinion. The bureau proposed replacing the Pact with "A New Grouping of Middle Eastern States". The proposal stated:

This framework will have to accord with the basic drives of the area-which is to say in addition to being anti-Communist it will also have to be anti-imperialist and pro-nationalist. It will, also, unfortunately, have to recognize the strong anti-Israeli sentiments of most of the area states...

Essentially Rountree and his staff recommended that work begin on an entirely new organization, larger in scope than the Baghdad Pact. It specifically excluded Israel, as well as two key European allies, Britain and France. With an optimistic implementation date of 28 January 1957, the proposal risked failure by trying to create a consensus of conservative Arab nations in a short period of time.

Whatever the approach would be it had to be in a form Arab allies could adopt, without fueling radical nationalist

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<sup>41</sup> Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs(Rountree) to the Secretary of State, "Revised Proposal for a New Middle Eastern Grouping", 5 DEC 1956. FRUS, p. 376.



propaganda. The essence of the problem and hints of the solution were highlighted during a December 7th meeting in the State Department:

...to find a vehicle for meeting the desire of the Arab governments, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iraq, for a convincing demonstration of U.S. intention to make its power felt in the area in a manner which would not smack of imperialism and which would leave the initiative to local countries...<sup>42</sup>

Dulles agreed with his own department that membership in the Baghdad Pact would play into the hands of the nationalists; but he appeared less inclined to follow Rountree's recommendation on the Middle East Charter. The Charter would involve months if not years to develop. In the interim, the United States would be without an instrument to handle interim problems in the region. American security concerns were rising as many countries were experiencing immediate economic problems. Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia were losing considerable revenues due to the closure of the canal and destruction of pipeline across Syria.<sup>43</sup> Dulles believed this could soon lead to social and political instability. The vehicle, in addition to being

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<sup>42</sup> Informal Record of a Meeting, Secretary Dulles' Office, Department of State, "Middle East", 7 DEC 1956, FRUS, p. 393.

<sup>43</sup> See paragraph 26, State Department Operations Coordinating Board Report, "Progress Report on U.S. Objectives and Policies With Respect to the Near East", released 22 December 1956, FRUS, p. 427.



quickly obtainable, also needed the ability to distribute military and economic support on short notice in order to be effective.

Dulles realized any policy change would also require maneuvering through a gauntlet of U.S. domestic interests. There was a risk in the process of provoking increased subversion from the Soviets or radical nationalists, if they perceived that the American government was not united. Dulles illustrated his concern to the American Ambassadors of the Baghdad Pact countries. He asked them, "suppose we can't get a 2/3 vote of Congress to join the Baghdad Pact without guaranteeing the same sort of thing to Israel, would you still want us to join? The (Secretary) said none of the Ambassadors knew the answer to that."<sup>44</sup> This same dilemma applied to the State Department's "New Middle East Grouping". Rountree's proposal did not explain how the administration would get Congress to support an organization which recognized "strong anti-Israeli sentiments".

Eisenhower and Dulles decided on a Congressional resolution, which would eventually be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. It would demonstrate, with Congressional support,

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<sup>44</sup> Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the President and Secretary of State, 6 December 1956. FRUS, p. 390.



American determination to bolster the military defense capabilities and economies of countries whose governments showed a determination to combat Communist infiltration".<sup>45</sup> This would be the equivalent of a commitment to promote stability in the region by containing subversion or reducing external political coercion from Egypt or Syria. Being a bi-lateral policy, between the United States and the country requesting support, the White House hoped to avoid placing a stigma on pro-West Arab governments which radical nationalist propaganda could label as lackeys of imperialism. It also kept the United States away from being formally associated with an organization that could be accused of "supporting" or "threatening" the security interests of Israel.<sup>46</sup> Within the next 90 days, the Doctrine would be worded to pass a Congressional vote and at the same time give the administration a capability to intervene quickly in different types of conflicts.

#### Rhetoric and Continuity in Strategy

In addition to placating popular anti-Western sentiments

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<sup>45</sup> Memorandum of Conversation Between the Secretary of State and Senator Knowland, 8 DEC 1956. FRUS, p. 397.

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the President and Secretary of State, 8 DEC 1956, FRUS, p. 394.



against a more interventionist American role, the administration needed to sell its increased involvement to Congress. Rountree summed up the administration's domestic legislative strategy in a memorandum to Dulles:

Communist imperialism is a clear and present danger and is so recognized by the American people and their representatives in Congress. We consider it unlikely that the latter would approve a resolution not aimed specifically at Communist imperialism...<sup>47</sup>

In the text of the Eisenhower Doctrine, communist imperialism was transcribed to international communism, which reflected Dulles' consistent concerns of the Soviets using the radical nationalists. In Dulles' mind, Moscow's ultimate plan was to subjugate the Middle Eastern states, as it had done to those in Eastern Europe. By painting the doctrine as a fight against communism, the White House reduced the possibility of congressional rejection. Not even the administration's sharpest policy critics wanted to appear "soft on communism". It also avoided explaining to Congress why the administration was confronting nationalism, particularly after trying to co-opt Nasser the previous three years. This would have been an admission of failed foreign policy. It would also avoided

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<sup>47</sup> Memorandum From Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Murphy) to the Secretary of State, "Proposed Joint Resolution of Congress Regarding the Middle East", 15 DEC 1956. Drafted by Rountree and Wilkins. FRUS, p. 410.



exposing the Doctrine's primary target, Nasser and the radical nationalists.

This inability to openly clarify the target of the resolution created ambiguities however, which incidently became the source of questions during subsequent congressional hearings. Representatives sought to clarify the resolution's use of "subversion" and "countries controlled by international communism". The resolution authorized the President:

...to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of any...nation...requesting such aid against overt armed aggression, from any nation controlled by international communism...<sup>48</sup>

During his testimony before Congress, Dulles affirmed that the administration did not think a Soviet invasion of the region was likely. He also could not identify any Arab nation "controlled by international communism", but made general connections between the Soviet Union, Egypt, and Syria.<sup>49</sup> Under casual analysis it appeared to be a dramatic but poorly thought out policy taken by Washington, to combat an unidentifiable communist threat. But Dulles' answers betrayed the inherent

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<sup>48</sup> Excerpt from Resolution 117. Quoted in Economic and Military Cooperation with Nations in the General Area of the Middle East, U.S. Government Printing Office, P.1.

<sup>49</sup> See Dulle's 7-9 JAN 1957 testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Economic and Military Cooperation with Nations in the General Area of the Middle East, 1957.



strategy of the resolution, which was no more, and no less, than an extension of the previous ten years of American regional policy.

Dulles was questioned about why the resolution referred to the threat of "internal subversion" but only dealt with "overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism". Dulles claimed it dealt with subversion in "substance" by achieving three things:

First, by reducing the fear of opened armed attack, a fear which...encourages the subversive elements within a country ....second,...it enables us to assist in military planning, so that they (Host government) will...have adequate and loyal and well equipped and adequately paid security forces...third,...is to permit economic assistance...

It was this combination that Dulles stated would provide as "complete a program against internal subversion as possible".<sup>50</sup>

The first "element" helped avoid a "Czech Scenario", where Nasserist or communist forces might combine internal unrest with external pressure from either Egypt or Syria. The second and third elements, military and economic assistance, were continuations of the Two-Pillar development strategy pursued by both the British and the United States since the late 1940s. The most significant aspect regarding these two, was that the administration was not required to get congressional

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid #19, P.16.



authorization before committing American resources.

Eisenhower and Dulles requested \$200 million for economic and military programs. The money for 1957 had already been appropriated for such projects and the same amounts were requested for both 1958 and 1959. The key was not necessarily the amount, but the change in the process. Before January 1957, a Congressional committee had to approve each project on an individual basis. Not only was this time consuming, but each action risked rejection or being weakened by respective interest groups. The resolution let the administration commit funds to programs the White House considered necessary to halt the "spread of international communism", only having to justify the entire program to Congress during January of each year. This avoided potential road blocks by Israel's congressional supporters and critics of foreign spending who previously blocked or diluted such aid to Arab states. It also gave the administration a speed almost equal to the Kremlin in providing aid as a political tool.<sup>51</sup> The second pillar, that of regional military security, proved to be the aspect most modified.

American strategy was now more concerned in controlling

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<sup>51</sup> For a detailed account of the evolution of Eisenhower's Economic aid strategy and the impact of U.S. domestic legislation, see Burton Kaufman, Trade and Aid: Eisenhower's Foreign Economic Policy, 1953-1961, 1982.



the spread of the radical nationalists; than in organizing the region against a Soviet military invasion. The concept of global containment took on a regional character in the Eisenhower Doctrine, but its creators did not necessarily see the region purely in Cold War terms. The stability of conservative Arab regimes was the immediate objective, but in the interest of evolutionary development.<sup>52</sup> The survival of the status-quo was not an end in itself. Although the Administration was putting Nasser on notice, it still regarded "this nationalism as an inevitable development which should be channeled, not opposed".<sup>53</sup> Eisenhower and Dulles, while more skeptical of Nasser than before, were in fact unchanged regarding the Arab revolution. But Washington's increased responsibility for Western concerns required the administration to act on American interests, not the radical nationalists. The next seventeen months would prove that as Nasser sought to expand his role, which required political turmoil, Washington

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<sup>52</sup> The theory and assumptions predominantly adopted by the Eisenhower administration and their applications in the fight against the spread of Communism are best illustrated in Millikan and Rostow, A Proposal: A Key to an Effective Foreign Policy, 1957. It is almost identical, if not simply a continuation of earlier British and American development philosophies.

<sup>53</sup> Operations Coordinating Board Report, "Progress Report on U.S. Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East (NSC 5428)", FRUS, p. 424.



would respond to re-establish stability.

The House of Representatives passed the Eisenhower Doctrine on 30 January 1957, followed by the Senate on 5 March. While legislators changed the basic outline of the White House draft, Eisenhower and Dulles obtained their essential element.<sup>54</sup> The President could provide military and economic aid without justifying each individual requirement under the requirements of the 1954 Mutual Security Act. With the domestic actions nearly complete, the regional ramifications were about to begin. The first test of the Eisenhower Doctrine was to come in Jordan, a country usually of secondary importance to Washington. The events of April 1957, would begin a regional Cold War within the context of the global Cold War, between Cairo and Washington.

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<sup>54</sup> The final House and Senate versions were essentially the same as the original draft submitted 5 JAN 1957. The most substantive changes were: the Administration had to justify its expenditures every July, in addition to January, and that no more above the \$200 million could be spent without special approval by Congress. For adopted Resolutions, see American Foreign Policy, Current Documents, 1957, Pg. 816 and 829.



The Eisenhower Doctrine in Jordan: 1957

Prior to February 1957, Dulles was not amenable to committing American resources to Jordan. As late as 24 December 1956, the British Ambassador to Washington observed that in Dulles' view, "the brutal fact was that Jordan had no justification as a state".<sup>55</sup> Dulles was not alone in this opinion. Few observers at the time thought the kingdom would survive the social and political upheavals in the Arab East. Hussein's ability to survive however, would surpass the expectations of his allies and adversaries. Supported by resources provided under the Eisenhower Doctrine, his actions in early 1957 would establish an opposition to Nasser that had thus far eluded the American administration. The King would use a political attack against the Jordanian radical nationalists, similar to the Administration's sales strategy of the Doctrine with Congress. This stalled his opponents long enough for the King to secure his own position, achieving to what amounted to a counter-coup.

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Uriel Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Radical Nationalism (Oxford, 1989), p. 47.



### Jordan: Two Concepts of Nationalism, One Country

On 15 December 1956, The New York Times carried an interview with Jordan's Premier Sulayman Nabulsi. "Jordan cannot live forever as Jordan," he proclaimed. "It must be connected militarily, economically and politically" with another Arab state, presumably Syria.<sup>56</sup> In a political meeting five days later, Nabulsi praised Nasser for thirty minutes without mentioning Hussein or Jordan.<sup>57</sup> The Premier did not elaborate on what would be his King's role in the eventual confederation. Such was the attitude of the country's highest elected official, who was also the Chairman of the national socialist party. Since the October 1956 elections, The nationalist socialists and their coalition had controlled 75% of parliament. Nabulsi's seven member cabinet included the first known communist to hold such a high level government position in the Arab world. Another member, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Abdallah Rimawi, was also secretary of the Jordanian Ba'th party.

Nabulsi's remarks came five days after he manipulated the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid #1, p. 45.

<sup>57</sup> George M. Haddad, Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East: The Arab States, Part I (University of California Press, 1971), p. 498.



withdrawal of an Iraqi army brigade from East Jordan. Iraqi, Syrian, and Saudi units had been sent during the Suez crisis to counter a potential Israeli invasion, but neither Damascus nor Riyadh had been asked to recall their forces. Nabulsi was against the presence of Iraqi troops from the start; he declared their presence illegal because Baghdad was not a signatory of the tripartite pact between Egypt, Syria, and Jordan.<sup>58</sup> Nabulsi did not explain why Saudi forces were allowed to stay, nor did he seek the King's approval. On 10 December, the Iraqi brigade and its Commander, Brigadier General Qassim, left Jordan.<sup>59</sup> Jordan's civilian government had left almost 3,000 Syrian troops within a 45 minute truck ride to Amman.

King Hussein had been forced to hold elections in October 1958. The Jordanian Ba'th and the communists had organized several demonstrations which had paralyzed his government. The organizers were supported in numbers by the socialists and

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid # 3, p. 497.

<sup>59</sup> Qassim would eventually lead the coup in Iraq on 14 July 1958 and the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq. During his units tour in Jordan he reportedly passed his intentions to stage a coup to Colonel Bizri of the Syrian army. See Haddad's, Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East, p. 544.



financed by Cairo and Saudi Arabia.<sup>60</sup> Once Nabulsi's party gained office, there was a struggle between the two elements of government: the parliament and the monarchy. The army, Hussein's source of power, was becoming increasingly political just like its counterparts in Egypt and Syria. The Bedouin units were strongly loyal to the King; however, army headquarters in Amman and units commanded and staffed by officers from the urban areas were less reliable. These elements formed the basis of Jordan's own "Free Officers", led by the Army Chief of Staff, thirty-four year old General Abu Nuwar. Only a major months before, he gained the Monarch's confidence and subsequent rank as Hussein's aide during the turbulent year of 1956. As Chief of Staff, he ensured that his own men were placed in influential military positions; simultaneously trying to lessen the resentment of the bedouin officers and growing suspicions of the King. But there was little question of Nuwar's loyalty. When the moment came to choose between the monarch or radical nationalists, Nuwar readily opted for the latter.

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<sup>60</sup> Agwani, Communism in the Arab East, p. 150. Through the end of 1956, King Saud's actions were parallel to Nasir's. This was to damage the positions of Iraq and Britain more than to enhance that of Nasir. It was not until after the Suez crisis and Nasir's soaring popularity, that Saud appears to realize Saudi Arabia was not immune to the same methods of subversion.



Prior to the October 1956 elections, the national socialists, the Ba'th, and the communists had called for the termination of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty. To replace British subsidies associated with the treaty, the Ba'th advocated economic ties with Egypt and Syria while the communist front championed the benefits of Soviet aid; neither masked their anti-monarchy sentiments. Until a greater Arab federation could be achieved, Nabulsi's socialists tolerated a constitutional monarchy. This relation worked as long as the country's direction was pro-Egypt and Syria, suspicious of Iraq, and sympathetic to the Soviet Union.<sup>61</sup> All three Jordanian parties endorsed a proposal made by Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia that they would replace the British subsidy. When the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty terminated on 13 March 1957, Hussein would rely financially on his three Arab neighbors.

Once Cairo and Damascus controlled a large portion of Jordan's budget, the balance of power would tip to Nabulsi and the cabinet. Hussein realized this and looked for assistance from the United States in December 1956, but Dulles' response was cool. The only thing the Secretary of State offered was to keep the ruler's entire request for American assistance

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<sup>61</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Radical Nationalism, p. 42.



confidential. He told the King that Washington was not happy with the direction Nabulsi was taking, and needed to see "Jordan maintain strong ties with the West if Jordan's economic needs (were) to be met".<sup>62</sup> In other words, if Hussein wanted American help, he would have to prove himself first.

On 16 January 1957, the British confirmed they would abrogate the Jordanian treaty in March. Hussein was in Cairo three days later to sign the Egyptian-Saudi-Syrian offer, but he was also preparing to meet Dulles' requirements. On 2 February 1957, Hussein broadcasted a message without prior warning to Nabulsi. The King attacked the infiltration of communist influence in the government, labelling it as a national danger. He turned the nationalist appeal against the radicals.

...Arab nationalism is at the very present facing a peril that threatens to destroy [Arab independence]....These aim at replacing an imperialism which no longer exists...with an imperialism of a new sort...if we allow the Communist doctrine a foothold in our country, we would be losing all our heritage as a nation...

Though Hussein mentioned no specific names or policies, the cabinet felt compelled to reassure the public they were not

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<sup>62</sup> Dulles to Mallory, 24 DEC 1956, FRUS, p. 79.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Richard H. Sanger's, Where the Jordan Flows (Washington D.C., 1963), p. 379.



communists, simply ardent nationalists.<sup>64</sup> On 5 February 1957, security forces loyal to Hussein confiscated communist publications and films, stopped the import of Soviet and Chinese journals, and closed down the weekly publication of the Jordanian Communist Party.

Nabulsi was not a communist, but a ba'thist. He and most of his cabinet members were anti-West as a result of their nationalism more than out of affiliation with Moscow. The source of their conflict with the King was that they saw the kingdom as a British creation. In their view, there was little legitimacy for the nation let alone a throne. Hussein could expect the same from Nasser and the Syrian regime. Neither were likely to tolerate any continued form of a monarchy initially established by the British. Hussein was also capable of using the same argument against his opponents, however. By associating the radical nationalists with communism and Soviet imperialism, the King questioned their legitimacy. Hussein was creating doubt in the public as to who the better nationalist was. The King was not only a descendent of royalty, he was the direct descendent of the first generation nationalists. For the first time, a conservative nationalist was putting radical

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<sup>64</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism, p. 49



nationalists on the defensive.

The King's argument of communist imperialism not only played upon the fears of his own people, but directly lent itself to the threat identified in the Eisenhower Doctrine. Here was the communist menace, ready to swallow Jordan. He did not have to wait long for a response. On 6 February Dulles notified the American Ambassador in Amman, Lester D. Mallory, to "immediately inform (the) King that we are highly gratified...in pointing out (the) Communist menace. We strongly share his view that Communist imperialism poses primary threat to the sound development of Arab nationalism".<sup>85</sup> A new partnership was forged between Dulles and Hussein.

#### THE APRIL CRISIS

During March 1957, Amman was again the site of several mass protests. During the three-day holiday proclaimed by the cabinet, celebrating the end of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, demonstrators choked the streets of Amman denouncing imperialism and the Eisenhower Doctrine. On 27 March, Hussein met with the Turkish Ambassador. The King acknowledged the potential of American assistance and stated extraordinary developments would

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<sup>85</sup> Dulles to Mallory, FEB 1957, FRUS, p. 83.



occur soon.<sup>66</sup> On 1 April 1957, Nuwar announced Jordan could acquire Soviet arms any time it wished. The next day, the Cabinet voted to recognize the Soviet Union despite Hussein's well known opposition. The position between the King and his cabinet was becoming irreconcilable. On 8 April, the First Armored Car Regiment moved from Zarqa to Amman. Finding his palace surrounded, Hussein angrily confronted his Chief of Staff and Premier. The leaders of the Coup hesitated. Nuwar ordered the regiment to return.<sup>67</sup> On 10 April, realizing how close he had come to being deposed, Hussein dismissed the Nabulsi government.

The next challenge came during the evening of 13 April. Hussein was informed by his uncle that officers were inciting specific units in Zarqa to march on Amman while trying to send those loyal to Hussein on maneuvers in the desert. Hussein again confronted Nuwar, who expressed surprise and offered to drive to the Zarqa camp and dispel these rumors. Hussein went personally, taking Nuwar with him. On the road, they encountered Bedouin units on their way to Amman to investigate

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<sup>66</sup> Mallory to Dulles, 29 MAR 1957, FRUS, p. 89.

<sup>67</sup> Uncertainty exists whether the events of 8 April 1957, were an actual coordinated attempt to overthrow Hussein, a rehearsal, or events initiated by one or a few Free Officers. See Agwani's, Communism in the Arab East, or Haddad's, Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East.



rumors that the King had been killed. When Hussein appeared the soldiers cheered. Upon seeing Nuwar they asked Hussein's permission to kill the Chief of Staff. The King sent Nuwar back to the palace, rallied his forces at Zarqa, and ensured Nuwar's clique of officers were removed. The next morning Nuwar and his family were escorted to the Syrian border.

Early on 14 April, Hussein learned that the Syrian brigade was preparing to move towards Amman. During the night of 15 April, after receiving permission from King Saud to place the Saudi brigade under Jordanian command, Hussein informed President Quwatli that any move by Syrian troops would be opposed by force. The President told Hussein that he was sure it was only a night maneuver, but he would order his troops to their barracks immediately.<sup>88</sup> The threat of internal subversion from Hussein's own army was now minimal. The possibility of a "Czech scenario" using Syrian troops appeared to be contained. After months of acquiescing to challenges to his authority, Hussein was able to act.

In the previous years the King had few practical allies. King Saud had not yet recognized Cairo as a threat to his own monarchy. Bringing in Iraq, with its British stigma, as a

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<sup>88</sup> Sanger, Where the Jordan Flows, p. 385. All Syrian units would leave Jordan by 26 May 1957, at Jordan's demand.



partner in the expulsion of Nabulsi's government would have associated Hussein to Western imperialism. This would have mocked his self proclaimed role as the real defender of Jordanian nationalism. The King did not want to hand Nabulsi or Cairo a justification for his overthrow. By linking the radical nationalists to communist imperialism, Hussein also connected his own interests into the philosophy behind the Eisenhower Doctrine. The King, as an Arab national leader, was making an association that Eisenhower and Dulles could never credibly make in the region. Communism was just as much an imperialist threat to the Arab East as Western capitalism was perceived to be. It was the same association as the Administration's reference to international communism, but without the accusation of Cold War interests. Hussein had just made Jordan as a "vital national interest of the United States".<sup>69</sup>

#### EGYPT'S LOST OPPORTUNITY

Throughout the military conspiracies of 8-15 April, the Egyptian government appeared ambivalent regarding events in Jordan. Nasser was vacillating. Nabulsi's cabinet had

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<sup>69</sup> Department of State Bulletin, v. 36, 13 May 1957, p. 767.



threatened to resign on 1 April due to "unconstitutional conduct" by the King. Hussein had sent his own representative to Cairo, without the knowledge of Nabulsi. The purpose of the delegation was to convince Nasser that no matter what Jordan's internal composition was, Amman would stand for the regional policies of Cairo.<sup>70</sup> Nasser reportedly instructed Nabulsi not to resign, but to remain in place. Hussein appears to have cast some temporary doubt about Jordan's radical nationalists in Cairo, similar to what he did with the Jordanian people. Also, Nasser probably did not want to alarm King Saud by disposing of a fellow monarch at a time when Saudi Arabia could lean over to the Americans.<sup>71</sup> It also appears Cairo was over confident. With the odds so heavily against Hussein, Nasser probably thought he could wait. If the coup attempts failed, the revolutionary spirit would rally overwhelming crowds which would sweep Hussein away. Whatever the Egyptian leader was thinking, by the time he became more involved, it was too late.

On April 17, during a National Security Council meeting, Allen Dulles reported that American intelligence had learned

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<sup>70</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism, p. 51.

<sup>71</sup> King Saud had visited Washington during the last week of January 1957, when the American's did their best to present Nasir as more of a threat to the Saudi monarchy than the Hashemites.



Nasser was "extremely unhappy" and "seeking every means of reversing the situation in Jordan".<sup>72</sup> The Egyptian leader was also reported to be irritated with King Saud, probably due to the Saudi military assistance to Hussein on the night of 15 April. Radio Cairo came back into full swing on 21 April with an announcement from General Hiyari. Hiyari, Nuwar's replacement as Chief of Staff, requested political asylum in Damascus. In a radio address from the Syrian capital, Hiyari claimed that the King, along with certain foreign elements, had master-minded the events of the last two weeks as part of a plot "to conspire against the independence of Jordan and ties with sister Arab countries".<sup>73</sup> The next day Jordanian radical nationalists drafted their final resolutions to the King.

The 22 April resolutions called for the expulsion of the American ambassador and army attache, rejection of the Eisenhower Doctrine, and an immediate federation with Syria. On 24 April the mob was formed and prepared to march, but a spokesman from the Foreign Ministry informed the protest leaders that the government would announce its decision regarding the Nablus resolutions on the next day. The riots were delayed.

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<sup>72</sup> Conversation between Allen Dulles and Secretary Dulles, 17 April 1957, FRUS, p. 98.

<sup>73</sup> Mallory to Dulles, 21 April 1957, FRUS, p. 100.



That night communist and ba'thist leaders were arrested and the police dissolved, their functions absorbed by the Army. The next morning, 25 April, all political parties were disbanded and martial law imposed. When the protesters tried to assemble the next day, most of their leadership was broken and their organizations declared illegal. The demonstrators were confronted by bedouin troops with blackened faces to avoid recognition should they have to fire into the crowds. There was no popular revolt in Amman that day.

It was not until Cairo came back publicly into the game and tried to force a popular revolt that Washington felt compelled to openly declare its support for Hussein. On 24 April, the Sixth fleet was dispatched to the Eastern Mediterranean under the authority of the Eisenhower Doctrine. The Resolution's applicability was a matter of confusion in the State Department up to 14 April.<sup>74</sup> On 23 April, the Secretary of State expanded the reach of the Resolution. To Dulles, the Doctrine was, "an attitude, a point of view, a state of mind". In the case of Jordan, Dulles stated the Doctrine was to help Hussein keep his country from falling "under the domination of

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<sup>74</sup> The Acting Secretary of State, in a meeting with the British Ambassador, stated that the Eisenhower Doctrine would not apply because Jordan's problems were essentially internal. There was no overt aggression from states controlled by international communism. FRUS, p. 93.



other countries which...work contrary to what the King considers the best interests of his country".<sup>75</sup> There was no mention of international communism. The Secretary was speaking of Cairo, not Moscow. Within twenty-four hours however, during a State Department news conference, international communism, not radical nationalism, became the source of the threat against Hussein.

The switch back to identifying communism as the source of instability was a justification, not an analysis. Hussein still had to establish his own credentials as an Arab nationalist. The King based his actions on saving Jordan from communism, not Egypt. He could not afford to be perceived as America's lackey. He would in fact never make an outright public endorsement of the Eisenhower Doctrine. Embracing the Doctrine was not a requirement however, containing Nasser was. During the last week of April, Dulles was also concerned that too much support would be an embarrassment to Hussein.<sup>76</sup> He preferred assisting Jordan via Saudi Arabia or other states to avoid the impression of strong Western ties. Yet, by the end of June 1957, the United States was providing \$30 million in economic and military

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<sup>75</sup> Statement by Dulles at News conference, 23 April 1957. Quoted in Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1957, p. 231.

<sup>76</sup> Phone conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, 25 April 1957, FRUS, p. 109.



aid, almost the annual sum of the previous British subsidy.<sup>17</sup>

Two-thirds of this was economic aid from Point Four funds, and all of it was administered under the less binding process of the Eisenhower Doctrine.

Hussein's victory resulted from his own actions more than the support he received from Washington, however. Washington's execution of the Doctrine and its related actions were actually anti-climatic. Hussein had already outmaneuvered and beaten his domestic opponents, although the presence of the 6th Fleet and American guarantees certainly would have to be weighed by Cairo and Damascus if they contemplated further intimidation with troops, as they had done on 15 April. The Doctrine clearly helped in terms of providing Hussein an option, however. When he appeared to have no allies, Washington had given him support with conditions. Hussein had to gain control on his own. Once he displayed his determination to establish his authority, the United States reciprocated with support. Ironically, in only four months, Hussein went from having no future to being the first to deal a real set-back to Nasser, removing some of the aura surrounding the force of radical nationalism.

Hussein's success was also a model victory of sorts to

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<sup>17</sup> Excerpts from News Conference Comments by the Secretary of State, 2 July 1957, Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1957, p. 233.



Washington. On the surface, the strategy behind the Eisenhower Doctrine appeared to be working. The spirit of the Resolution was in fact to assist efforts against subversion and not for the United States to do it alone. By taking limited actions, the Administration had supported a "re-birth" of conservative Arab nationalism in Jordan, without igniting the emotions of Suez. Unfortunately, the White House was about to forget some of the basic lessons it had learned. As the end of 1957 approached, the inherently reactive and defensive nature of the Eisenhower Doctrine would be replaced for a proactive policy in Syria. The results would not be as positive as in Jordan.



#### IV

##### Syria 1957: Forgetting Lessons Learned

King Hussein's success in the April 1957 proved that the power of the radical nationalists could be tempered. For the next three months Hussein continued to attack publicly the regimes in Cairo and Damascus, labeling them "false nationalists". The King argued that close ties to Moscow and the atheism of communism threatened the foundation of the Arab religious culture. He also contended there was no such thing as Egyptian and Syrian neutralism, and that they had sided with Moscow in the Cold War.<sup>78</sup> Radio Cairo countered with accusations of its own against Amman, but Nasser himself remained quiet. With Nasser's momentum apparently stalled, Washington began to concentrate almost exclusively on what Dulles perceived to be the other face of radical nationalism.

When formulating the Eisenhower Doctrine, Dulles focused on Syria, not Egypt, as the most likely to become a Soviet satellite in the Arab East. He was concerned that the alliance between the Communist and Ba'th parties would lead to the latter

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<sup>78</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism, Chapter 5.



being manipulated and consumed by international communism. Because of Syria's central location, it could prove to be a greater threat to Western interests than Nasser. Dulles' plan to deal with such a situation was to "pinch off" the country from Soviet control. If the country was not contiguous to the Soviet Union like Eastern Europe, Dulles did not believe Moscow would exert itself to maintain Syria as a satellite.<sup>79</sup> In May 1957, Washington began planning to eliminate the perceived Arab communist threat.<sup>80</sup>

The White House approach to Syria concentrated on combatting international communism more than radical nationalism. The American administration displayed little of the respect it had previously given to Nasser's revolution when developing the Eisenhower Doctrine. This would prove to be the Administration's critical mistake in applying the "attitude" of the Doctrine. By September 1957, Washington would create its own Suez crisis and tip the initiative back to Cairo. Ironically, Nasser would feel compelled to finish what Dulles started in Syria, but for very different reasons.

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<sup>79</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Lloyd, 10 DEC 1956, FRUS, p. 73.

<sup>80</sup> Little, "Cold War and Covert Action", p. 72.



Syrian Radicalism: The Ba'th, the Communists, and the Army

Dulles was not alone in his assessment that Syria could easily become a Soviet satellite. The American Ambassador in Damascus wrote to Dulles on 17 May 1957:

Syria has willfully become [a] base for anti-American propaganda, leftist penetration of labor, sabotage and Communist activity throughout [the] area...[conservative] opposition shows no sign of competent and courageous leadership...

These interpretations were not only a product of the current administration in Washington and its appointees. Syria had long been the center of revolutionary political action, attracting the attention of the Truman administration as well. For almost ten years, the United States unsuccessfully tried to promote conservative Syrian politicians. Washington's inability to simultaneously satisfy Israeli and Arab concerns however, led to the same predicament the White House experienced with Egypt during 1955 and 1956. A key difference between Egypt and Syria though, was that no leader with the charisma and power of Nasser emerged in Damascus.

Between 1949 and 1955, Syria's government suffered from chronic instability, having been overthrown six times by military coups. By 1956, the Syrian Army was split in two

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<sup>81</sup> Moose to Dulles, 17 May 1957, FRUS, p. 618.



primary blocs: older conservative officers with social roots in prominent Damascene commercial families and younger officers from religious minorities with predominantly rural backgrounds. Inspired by Nasser's success in Egypt and disillusioned with Syria's traditional politicians, the younger Syrian officers were drawn to the goals of radical nationalism. Some turned to communism as an alternative, but a larger number were more attracted to the doctrine of "Arab-Socialism" as defined by the Ba'th party.

The Syrian Ba'th combined two popular political themes circulating in the Arab world during the 1950s. The first of these was socialism and its promise to reform the existing social structure. The second was that of "Pan Arabism", or the unification of all Arab lands into one greater Arab nation.<sup>82</sup>

As in Jordan, both parties found a common domestic enemy in the conservative politicians. Yet throughout the early 1950s, the Ba'th could not win a majority in Syria's elected government. Most of Syria's strong merchant families distrusted socialism. The Ba'th and the Communists allied to combine their strength against the conservative politicians. The radical nationalists recruited and achieved political influence through military and

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<sup>82</sup> Albert Hourani, A History of the Arab Peoples (Cambridge, 1991), p. 404-407.



civilian officials in key government positions.<sup>83</sup> They limited themselves to foreign affairs, which was less alienating to the commercial traditions of the country. Their foreign policy did find popular support, promoting similar and sometimes identical policies as Egypt: neutrality in the Cold War, eliminating Israel, and increasing political autonomy from the Western bloc.

Nasser's growing popularity enhanced the status of Syria's own radical nationalists and their ability to control the direction of the country's foreign policy. During the Suez crisis, the White House became alarmed by the possibility of Soviet fighter aircraft being stationed on airfields near Damascus.<sup>84</sup> On 17 January 1957, the Joint Chiefs confirmed that Syria had received 24 MIG-15 fighters, 130 T-34 battle tanks with approximately 100 Soviet technicians.<sup>85</sup> In the May 1957 elections, the Ba'ath and Communist Parties coordinated their campaign efforts. Using the anti-Western feelings generated by the Suez crisis, they scored their first success in general elections. The Soviets also contributed by encouraging many

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<sup>83</sup> Jaber, The Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party; History, Ideology, and Organization, Chapter 3.

<sup>84</sup> National Security Council notes, 6 NOV 1956. Quoted in Little, p. 68.

<sup>85</sup> JCS memorandum, 17 JAN 1957. Quoted in Little, p. 69. In subsequent reports the number of technicians would be reduced to about 50.



hard line communist candidates to withdraw their names, allowing more Ba'thists or independent socialists to capture the vote.<sup>86</sup> The Syrian political left captured half of the civilian government, but the previous years of military political involvement eroded the strength of the civilian institutions. Real power lay in the hands of the Syrian Army, particularly its intelligence chief, Major Abd al-Hamid Sarraj.

With a monopoly on Syrian intelligence and the internal security apparatus, Sarraj was in a very powerful position.<sup>87</sup> He was a strong supporter of Nasser, but extended his influence through the Ba'th.<sup>88</sup> Following the May elections, Sarraj established a Revolutionary Command Council modeled after Egypt's. All but one of the eight members of the council were associated with the Ba'th or Communist Parties. The goal of the council was not to immediately seize the government, but to use it as a front, and control the country through its civilian contacts.<sup>89</sup> It was this complexity of relationships that

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<sup>86</sup> Lesch, Syria and the United States, p. 113.

<sup>87</sup> Sarraj's position as director of the country's security services was equivalent to the authority of the Directors of the American CIA and FBI combined.

<sup>88</sup> Patrick Seale, The Struggle For Syria (London, 1965), p. 245.

<sup>89</sup> Lesch, Syria and the United States, p. 116.



alarmed Washington:

The [Revolutionary Command Council] is reportedly receiving support from Nasser. It plans to dissolve parliament, purge the Army of rightist elements, and to declare an immediate union with Egypt...the USSR has promised <sup>90</sup> support...with troops and material, if needed...

The pattern of the Army's ties to the Ba'th and Communist Parties were parallel to Dulles' concerns regarding international communism. The previous distinctions Dulles and Eisenhower made in Jordan regarding Nasser, radical nationalism, and communism were becoming increasingly difficult to identify. In Washington's opinion, Syria appeared to be transforming into a Soviet client state.

The American administration felt that events in Syria portrayed a more advanced stage of subversion and that international communism could very well prevail over the Nasserists and the Ba'thists. On 29 April, Eisenhower stated that if Syria could be stabilized, "America would come a long way in an effort to establish peace in that troubled area".<sup>91</sup> Establishing peace entailed removing the Syrian radical nationalists, now almost synonymous with the communists in the

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<sup>90</sup> Memorandum for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Possible Leftist Coup in Syria", 17 JUN 1957. Quoted in Lesch, p. 116.

<sup>91</sup> Eisenhower, Waging Peace, p. 193-194.



eyes of the Administration. The problem that Eisenhower and Dulles faced, was that the communists were not yet in control. An American attempt to reverse events in Damascus would equate to an attack on the Ba'th, Arab radical nationalism, and ultimately Nasser.

American Intervention: "Suez in Reverse"

On 30 July 1957, the Syrian Defense Minister, Khalid al-Azm, signed a \$500 million economic and military agreement with Moscow. This apparently convinced the White House that events in Damascus had gone too far. On 12 August, Sarraj expelled Howard Stone and two other American Embassy employees on the grounds that they were plotting to overthrow the government and replace it with a conservative regime. The plot, code named "Wappen", was consistently exposed to Sarraj by Syrian officers whom Stone and his operatives attempted to recruit.<sup>92</sup> The Syrian Revolutionary Command Council used the incident to arrest or dismiss conservative and moderate political opponents. The moderate Army Chief of Staff was replaced by General Bizri.

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<sup>92</sup> For descriptions of the American operation code named "Wappen", see Lesch's, Syria and the United States, Eveland's, Ropes of Sand, and Seale's, Struggle for Syria.



generally believed to be a communist sympathizer.<sup>93</sup> With a failure in the covert arena, Eisenhower and Dulles modified their efforts to "pinch off" the Syrian left by encouraging conservative Arab countries to pressure Damascus.

The purpose of using Washington's Arab allies was to try to create a situation where the Eisenhower Doctrine could be used. Unlike Jordan, there was no established leader who would request American assistance or to declare that the country was being subverted by communism. Due to the complexity of relations between the various radical nationalist factions, Washington could not identify a clear scenario which would justify the Doctrine. Dulles advised Eisenhower on 20 August 1957, not to assert that Syria was controlled by international communism, because the situation was "still confused" and the United States did "not yet know how far along this pattern has yet gone".<sup>94</sup> The wording of the Eisenhower Doctrine had provided flexibility in responding to the Jordan crisis. In Syria, it was serving as a straight jacket. The Ba'thists and the Army were quick to issue public statements and press

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<sup>93</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, 36.7-57, 3 SEP 1957, "Developments in the Syrian Situation", FRUS, p. 675.

<sup>94</sup> Dulles to Eisenhower, 20 AUG 1957, FRUS, p. 641. The pattern Dulles referred to was that of the method used by international communism to gain control of a country.



conferences to point out they were not communists. If Washington intervened they would look like the British and French at Suez. If the Doctrine could not be implemented due to Syrian domestic circumstances however, there was a chance it could be initiated by outside forces.

On 24 August 1957, Eisenhower dispatched Loy Henderson, Deputy Under Secretary of State, to Istanbul for a meeting with representatives of Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. The purpose of the meeting was provide the material and funds for an intervention initiated and conducted by one of the three Arab participants.<sup>95</sup> Eisenhower believed that combined military pressure from Jordan, Syria, and Iraq would force the Syrian regime to collapse, if not overthrown by its own people.<sup>96</sup> The Administration hoped to rally Syrian conservatives to try a counter-coup, similar to what transpired in Jordan, or entice Syria to become militarily engaged with one of the conservative Arab states. Once engaged, the United States could respond to the conservative nation's request for assistance under the auspices of the Doctrine. Despite American and Turkish encouragement, none of the Arab monarchies would participate.

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<sup>95</sup> Dulles to Henderson in Turkey, 23 AUG 1957, FRUS, p. 650.

<sup>96</sup> Eisenhower, Waging Peace, p. 198.



Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia agreed that the Syrian regime was undesirable, but none were willing to openly take on the radical nationalists and face the potential political repercussions at home.

The weaknesses of America's conservative Arab allies were exposed by the crisis. One problem was a mutual distrust between Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>97</sup> None of them wanted to initiate such a provocative action against Syria with the possibility of being abandoned by the other two in the middle of a crisis. This would leave the provocateur isolated, appearing to be the lackey of American imperialism. This dilemma actually materialized when King Saud tried to use the crisis to bolster his own prestige in the Arab world.

With Nasser apparently out of the picture, still quiet after the "Jordan" affair, Saud tried to assume regional leadership by pursuing a diplomatic solution. On 10 September 1957, the Saudi Ambassador in Damascus said Riyadh would "spare no effort to support, back, and aid" Syria if it was the target of aggression.<sup>98</sup> The two Hashemite kings were forced to quickly follow Saud or be left alone on the side of the United States.

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<sup>97</sup> Embassy in Turkey to Department of State, 3 SEP 1957, FRUS, p. 670.

<sup>98</sup> FBIS, 11 SEP 1957. Quoted in Lesch, Syria and the United States, p. 174.



Saud's actions proved to be premature. He alienated Eisenhower and degraded the appearance of an Arab conservative alliance. Saud was also mistaken in his perception that Nasser was doing nothing. Events soon proved that Nasser had his own plans.

The Administration's second try to bring down the Syrian left had failed. Washington would escalate the situation again by encouraging Turkey to bring pressure on Damascus, using similar tactics it had hoped the Arab monarchies would use. The Syrian crisis extended into October 1957, ultimately leading to open Soviet threats against Turkey in the Kremlin's support of Damascus. For Moscow, this produced a similar propaganda victory as the one achieved during the Suez crisis. Although Eisenhower and Dulles eventually backed out, they accomplished what the British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan described as "Suez in reverse".<sup>99</sup> The conservative states of the Arab East were forced to distance themselves temporarily from the United States to avoid mass protests of American pressure on Damascus. Even Hussein felt compelled to switch his own propaganda themes from challenging the nationalist credibility of Egypt and Syria, to that of the Israeli threat, not a theme of particular benefit

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<sup>99</sup> Harold MacMillan, Riding the Storm, 1956-1959 (New York, 1971), p. 279-280. MacMillan further commented that, "If it were not serious (referring to the crisis)...it would be rather comic".



to the United States.<sup>100</sup> Despite the failure of the Eisenhower administration's actions, its objectives were not lost. Nasser would recognize the threat to his own position and remove the Syrian Communists; but Cairo's ultimate objectives were far from Washington's.

#### Egypt Takes Control

Nasser was quick to take advantage of the situation that Washington and Riyadh provided in September 1957. While King Saud was advancing his solution to the Syrian crisis, Nasser was formulating his own. On 11 September 1957, General Bizri, (who had commanded the Syrian brigade which threatened Hussein in Jordan), and Sarraj, now a Colonel, met with Nasser in Cairo to plan Egypt's military intervention in Syria.<sup>101</sup> On 13 October Egypt landed 2,000 troops at Latakia. The message to the Arab world was clear. While Saud talked about resolving the Syrian

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<sup>100</sup> Lesch, Syria and the United States, p.179. In his work, Lesch implies that the Eisenhower administration's actions in Syria were representative of Washington's entire approach to the Arab East during the late 1950s. While this author agrees with many of Lesch's conclusions specifically regarding Washington's policy towards Syria in 1957, to treat the Syrian crisis as the norm is an over simplification of Eisenhower and Dulles' approach to Nasser, radical nationalism, and the Arab East.

<sup>101</sup> Seale, The Struggle For Syria, p. 306.



crisis, Nasser was taking action. The military significance of 2,000 troops was minimal if in fact Syria were to be invaded by an outside force. The political victory however, re-affirmed that Nasser was the leader of Arab nationalism in the Arab East. There was little question, despite Hussein's rhetorical challenges and Saud's professed leadership, that Nasser remained the hero of the Arab revolution.

Cairo's intervention surprised everyone but its planners. Nasser, like Dulles, was becoming increasingly alarmed with the growing power of the communists in Syria. He and his Syrian allies had been unaware of the depth of Syria's economic agreement with the Soviet Union, negotiated by Khalid al-Azm in late July.<sup>102</sup> In August 1957, Nasser promised the Syrian populist party leader that Egypt would not allow Syria to fall victim to a Communist Party take over.<sup>103</sup> Both the Ba'th and the Communist Parties had achieved what they wanted in the country, eliminating the Syrian conservatives from constituting a domestic political threat. The Ba'th Party leaders were now beginning to perceive that they had been used by the communists

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<sup>102</sup> British Embassy-Beirut, 19 AUG 1957, FO 371/128228. Quoted in Lesch, P. 167.

<sup>103</sup> Lesch, Syria and the United States, p. 182.



who would soon become too powerful for the Ba'th to fight alone.<sup>104</sup> The Ba'thists in the Syrian Army went to Cairo for support, which they found in Nasser.

Despite his own concerns regarding the communists, Nasser conveyed to the United States that it was over reacting. During a discussion with the American Ambassador in Egypt on 1 September 1957, Nasser commented that the situation in Syria, "is much better, much calmer" and "there is a greater feeling of security".<sup>105</sup> He claimed Syria would not sacrifice its independence to the Soviet Union. Nasser also recommended that Washington should "go in for a bit of psychiatry" and deal with Syria more "gently". Nasser's own actions on 11 September with Bizri and Sarraj however, betray the sincerity of his own advice to Washington. As the United States and the Soviet Union were debating in the United Nations over the future political orientation of Syria, Nasser was preparing to handle the crisis his own way.

Nasser's actions over the next four months were based more on maintaining his own leadership in the Arab East, than fear of communism itself. In November of 1957, the Syrian Ba'th began negotiations with Nasser to unify the two countries. Membership

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<sup>104</sup> Jaber, The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, p. 44.

<sup>105</sup> Hare to Dulles, 1 SEP 1957, FRUS, p. 665.



to the Syrian Communist Party was increasing in popularity. The communists were becoming more demanding in their partnership with the Ba'th and pushing for closer ties with the Soviet Union.<sup>106</sup> The Ba'th was beginning to fear that it was losing control of the communists, something they had always discounted. A communist regime in Syria would not necessarily threaten Nasser in Egypt, but it could threaten his position as the leader of Arab radical nationalism. For years the socialist and communists had been the main political parties comprising radical nationalism, but did not fully control a government as Nasser did. If the Communist Party dominated Syria however, could Nasser continue to get the same level of Soviet support without competing with the Syrian Communists for it?

In December 1957, Nasser approached the American Ambassador in Cairo and requested that the United States keep its "hands off Syria for a period of three months". Citing the need to counter the communists, he wanted to ensure that Washington did nothing to further antagonize anti-Western feelings.<sup>107</sup> On 1 February 1957, Egypt and Syria announced the formation of the United Arab Republic. The growing popularity of the communists was absorbed by Nasser in the euphoria

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<sup>106</sup> Seale, The Struggle For Syria, p. 316-317.

<sup>107</sup> Hare to Dulles, 11 DEC 1957, FRUS, p. 745.



surrounding what appeared to be the first step towards Pan-Arabism. The Egyptian leader accomplished what Dulles had tried four months before: keeping Syria from falling deeper into the Soviet sphere of influence. At the same time, Nasser achieved his highest level of popularity, surpassing that of the Suez crisis.

Nasser did not waste his moment. Although Washington and Egypt had finally found common ground in opposition to Arab communism, they arrived there with different objectives. Dulles and Eisenhower sought stability, but could not find an effective way to apply their Doctrine in Syria. It had been designed to counter subversion, not create it. Nasser sought expansion of his power through revolution and viewed American efforts a threat to his source of strength. An Egyptian official summarized Cairo's attitude to the American Ambassador:

The main difference between the United States and Egypt was their attitude towards nationalism. Egypt felt that nationalism among the masses was the driving force which would prevail, whereas the United States elected to deal with governments which...were out of touch with basic reality, <sup>108</sup> such as Lebanon, Jordan, and even Saudi Arabia...

Nasser was miscalculating American desire to maintain the status quo, however. In Lebanon, American policy would prove that it emphasized stability more than maintaining conservative regimes.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid #30. Remark contained in note 2 of message 1426.



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Lebanon: Containing Nasser's Revolution

The formation of the United Arab Republic signified the most dramatic turning point in the evolution of radical nationalism. At Suez, Nasser stood firm and survived the combined force of Britain, France, and Israel. In February 1958, he went one step further by agreeing to unite with Syria. To the Arab world, Nasser appeared to be dismantling the political boundaries imposed on it by the European empires. His partnership with the Syrian Ba'ith made Egypt the center of two prominent political themes in the Arab East during the decade, Arab socialism and Pan Arabism. Cairo was now the undisputed capital of the Arab revolution.

The reactions of conservative Arab states were mixed. Jordan and Iraq put aside their mutual distrust long enough to try to form a similar union, the Arab Federation, on 14 February 1958. It paled in popularity to the United Arab Republic. King Saud paused, as Nasser did after the Jordan affair, and attempted to minimize the damage to his prestige brought on by his lost bid for leadership in the Arab East. The Syrian Communists were forced underground by the Nasserist-Ba'thist



alliance in Damascus. In Lebanon, the revolutionary forces began to stir with new energy that would ultimately bring the struggle between Cairo and Washington out in the open.

Subversion in Lebanon, sponsored from Cairo, would be more active and overt than it was in Jordan during 1957. International communism, which dominated the conversations of the White House in late 1957, almost disappeared from Eisenhower and Dulles' vocabulary in their discussions regarding Lebanon. America would take its most dramatic actions to contain radical nationalism, but with little reference to the Eisenhower Doctrine. The Lebanese crisis was about to expose the consistency behind the American approach to the region and assumptions on which it was based.

#### Chamoun and the Rebellion: Setting the Stage

The focus of the American-Egyptian confrontation in Lebanon revolved around President Camille Chamoun. Elected in 1952, he was then seen as a source of stability in the Lebanese political arena. His reputation was that of a patriot and a nationalist. As Arab nationalism split into its respective radical and conservative paths in the mid 1950s however, Chamoun proved to be more along the lines of the first generation



nationalists. His Maronite background and roots from one of the country's more cosmopolitan families clashed with the increasingly socialistic radical nationalism. He refused to break relations with Britain and France during the Suez crisis. In early 1957, Chamoun was the only leader in the Arab East to openly embrace the Eisenhower Doctrine.<sup>109</sup> Neither event ingratiated him with Nasser, nor with the Lebanese political opposition.

The domestic opposition was a mixture of religious and ethnic groups with various political agendas, but united in their opposition to Chamoun. The beginning of their revolt can be traced to the May 1957 elections. Chamoun's supporters in the Lebanese parliament won a clear majority, apparently by rigging the elections better than the opposition.<sup>110</sup> It appeared to many leaders, across the political spectrum, that Chamoun was purposely trying to destroy their bases of political power.<sup>111</sup> Chamoun's intentions to use his new parliament to amend the constitution and secure for him a second term, confirmed the opposition's suspicions. The anti-West sympathy

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<sup>109</sup> Malcom Kerr, "The Lebanese Civil War", Chapter 4 in The International Regulation of Civil Wars (London, 1972), p.69.

<sup>110</sup> Eveland, Ropes of Sand, p. 250-3.

<sup>111</sup> Hudson, The Precarious Republic, p. 44 and 52.



generated by the American-Syrian crisis, followed by the formation of the United Arab Republic, also contributed to the popular Lebanese apathy towards to the Chamoun regime.

Months of limited violence in late 1957 and the first months of 1958 attracted American attention. Dulles took an early position of regarding the next Presidential elections in Lebanon an internal matter. Despite reports that certain rebel factions were receiving support from across the Syrian border, Dulles expressed concern that Chamoun's bid for a second term was also affecting Lebanon's internal stability. In March 1958, Dulles conveyed to Chamoun that America would adopt an attitude of "aloofness to this internal Lebanese problem".<sup>112</sup> Dulles' response to Chamoun came when Washington and Cairo were making small signs of reconciliation to each other.

The United States received the formation of the United Arab Republic cautiously, but also with some comfort because it perceived that Nasser had over extended himself. The American Ambassador in Egypt, Raymond Hare, suggested to Dulles that if Cairo "did not rashly embark on a hostile campaign against us or our friends", it would then be advisable to take on a more reconcilable approach to Nasser.<sup>113</sup> Over the next 90 days

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<sup>112</sup> Dulles to McClintock, 18 MAR 1958, FRUS, p. 17.

<sup>113</sup> Hare to Dulles, 10 FEB 1958, FRUS, p. 425.



American-Egyptian diplomatic approaches, though cordial, reflected early efforts to find a common ground on which each other's interests could be met. Nasser, through the Egyptian Ambassador in the United States, professed that Egypt had no intention of attacking her neighbors. Dulles stressed that Egypt had nothing to fear from America.<sup>114</sup> By early May however, it became evident that Nasser's radical nationalism had not yet played out.

#### The Lebanese Rebellion

The rebellion itself was touched off on 8 May 1958, by the assassination of a journalist, Nasib Metni, widely known for his criticism of the Chamoun government. The rebel leadership blamed the government. The government accused the rebels.<sup>115</sup> The combatants of both sides operated in militia, divided along religious and political factions. Despite the many differences

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<sup>114</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Ambassador Hussein of Egypt and Dulles, 3 MAR 1958, FRUS, p. 432.

<sup>115</sup> The identity and motivation of the assassins is still contended. In Revolution and Military Rule in the Middle East, p. 419-20, Haddad cites a conspiracy by Chamoun's political opposition, claiming they in fact killed Metni in order to spark the rebellion. The majority of studies on the Lebanese crisis cite the opposition claim. No hard evidence currently exists to draw firm conclusions.



of the insurgents, they repeatedly proclaimed their common objective: the immediate removal of Chamoun. The Army, commanded by General Chehab, did not enter the fight except to protect key government facilities. Chehab, being as neutral as he could be, feared the Army would dissolve along the same religious and political lines of the militia, if it entered the fighting on the side of the regime. Unable to get his Army to act, Chamoun began appealing to the United States for support. He promptly accused the United Arab Republic as the perpetrator, claiming it was supporting the rebels.

Evidence did exist regarding the regime's claims. In early May 1958, Border guards discovered arms and explosives in the car of the Belgian Consul from Damascus. This was followed by a Syrian raiding party, which crossed the border and killed five Lebanese border guards.<sup>116</sup> American intelligence assessed that the rebels, both Christian and Moslem, were receiving weapons, supplies, "volunteers", and policy guidance from Egypt, through Syria.<sup>117</sup> On 16 May 1958, in reference to the Metni assassination, Nasser proclaimed, "The conscience of the people of Lebanon was shocked because it knew the assassins

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<sup>116</sup> Kerr, "The Lebanese Civil War", p. 75.

<sup>117</sup> SNIE 36.4-58, FRUS, p. 94.



and criminals".<sup>118</sup> On 13 May 1958, Chamoun informed Robert McClintock, the American Ambassador in Beirut, that he might request foreign troops within 24 hours.<sup>119</sup> Washington clearly believed Nasser was assisting the rebels, but Dulles and Eisenhower were reluctant to move into Lebanon.

#### Negotiations with Nasser and the Eisenhower Doctrine

During meetings in the White House on 13 May 1958, it was quite clear that Dulles was not enthusiastic about applying the Eisenhower Doctrine. He spent more time outlining why the United States could not invoke it.<sup>120</sup> Opposite to his broad interpretations of the Doctrine's applicability in Jordan during 1957, Dulles stated that it could not be invoked unless it could be proven that the United Arab Republic attacked Lebanon and that Cairo was under the control of international communism. Dulles obviously knew that the requirement of international communism would not be proven. After the Syrian crisis and the formation of the United Arab Republic, was the "spirit" of the

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<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Haddad, p. 420.

<sup>119</sup> McClintock to Dulles, 13 MAY 1958, FRUS, p. 41.

<sup>120</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Dulles and Eisenhower, 13 MAY 1958, FRUS p. 46.



Doctrine not as strong?

The message sent back to Chamoun on 13 May, displayed the American reluctance by adding three more interdependent points: Lebanon would have to file a complaint with the United Nations regarding Cairo's support to the rebels, America would receive the public support of at least some Arab states, and that Chamoun would not seek a second term.<sup>121</sup> The Administration was informing Chamoun that he did not possess a blank check regarding American assistance. On 15 May 1958, Dulles instructed Ambassador Hare in Cairo to approach Nasser. The message was simple: America was committed to uphold Lebanon's "independence and integrity".<sup>122</sup> Washington was also convinced Cairo was supporting the Lebanese rebels. If Nasser was sincere in his earlier statements regarding better relations with the United States, he would use his influence to moderate the subversion.

On 20 May 1958, Nasser met with Hare and offered to mediate with the rebels. He stated three primary points: amnesty for the opposition, that General Chehab become the Prime Minister, and for Chamoun to disclaim any intention of modifying

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<sup>121</sup> Dulles to McClintock, 13 May 1958, FRUS, p. 49.

<sup>122</sup> Dulles to Hare, 15 MAY 1958, FRUS, p. 55.



the constitution, but serve his full term.<sup>123</sup> On 27 May 1958, the Lebanese government announced on Radio Beirut that the government would not introduce any constitutional amendment allowing Chamoun a second term. This however, would be the most conciliatory gesture on the part of the Lebanese government. Negotiations continued between Nasser's representative Muhammad Heikal and Ambassador Hare, but Chamoun considered the talks a "sellout".<sup>124</sup> Cairo could not, or did not, get the Lebanese rebels to stop demanding Chamoun's immediate resignation. Attacks against Chamoun from radio Cairo also continued unabated. By June 1958, Dulles also became increasingly reluctant to push Nasser's proposal on Lebanon and contribute to what he described as "placing a seal of respectability upon Nasser's intervention".<sup>125</sup> By 13 June 1958, it was evident that the negotiations were leading nowhere. Nasser, reported Heikal, felt he was "being played for a sucker".<sup>126</sup> The next day, a fierce rebel offensive began in downtown Beirut.

The Eisenhower administration was caught not only between Beirut and Cairo, but within its own philosophy as well. The

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<sup>123</sup> Hare to Dulles, 20 MAY 1958, FRUS p. 69.

<sup>124</sup> McClintock to Dulles, 6 JUN 1958, FRUS p. 98.

<sup>125</sup> Dulles to Hare, 5 JUN 1958, FRUS p. 92.

<sup>126</sup> Hare to Dulles, 16 JUN 1958, FRUS, p. 452.



reluctance of the American administration showed that it was not willing to intervene simply to maintain the status quo in Lebanon. Dulles made it very explicit to Chamoun, that the Lebanese government could not depend on American troops to settle what Washington considered an internal political matter.<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, Dulles and Eisenhower felt they could not let Nasser achieve his aims, or those of his Lebanese allies, by insurrection. Washington would not blindly support the status quo, nor would they stand aside and let Chamoun be taken out by rebellion. By not containing radical nationalism in Lebanon, the only country in the Arab East which had embraced the Eisenhower Doctrine, the United States would destroy its own credibility as an ally.

Following a meeting on 27 June 1958, Hare reported that Nasser still sought to find a negotiated settlement regarding Lebanon and could not understand America's unwillingness to follow Egypt's proposal. On 3 July, Hare reported he had been informed that Nasser wanted Washington to give him six months to demonstrate his good intent.<sup>128</sup> On 7 July 1958, Nasser

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<sup>127</sup> Dulles to McClintock, 23 MAY 1958, FRUS, p. 75.

<sup>128</sup> Nasir discussion contained in 27 JUN 1958, message from Hare to Dulles, FRUS, p. 458. Ambassador Designate Kamel discussion of 3 JUL 1958, contained in message from Hare to Dulles, FRUS, p. 461.



departed the country for an Eastern European tour. The rebellion in Lebanon continued unabated consuming much of Washington's regional focus. Joint Anglo-American planning to intervene militarily, begun as early as November 1957, was essentially completed and ready to be implemented. The most significant events of late June and early July however, did not occur in Lebanon, but in Jordan and Iraq.

On 29 June 1958, a second plot against King Hussein's regime was uncovered. While Nasser had been professing his intent to help stabilize Lebanon, evidence was building that the plot had been engineered by Syria's Colonel Sarraj, now a key official of the United Arab Republic.<sup>129</sup> On 1 July 1958, the Iraqi government agreed to send one brigade to bolster Hussein, at least until Jordan could sort out the conspirators in its Army. The brigade commander, General Arif, had other plans. As his unit passed through Baghdad on 14 October 1958, his troops overthrew the Iraqi government and killed the royal family. General Qassim, arrived shortly after to assume leadership of the country.<sup>130</sup> As the details of the revolution and the

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<sup>129</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radical Nationalism, p. 87.

<sup>130</sup> Khalidi, Rashid, "The Impact of the Arab Revolution on the Arab World", in Fernea and Louis', The Iraqi Revolution of 1958, p. 111-13.



loyalties of its conspirators would unfold in later years, it became evident that Cairo was not aware of the Iraqi coup. Pictures of Nasser however, quickly filled Baghdad street front windows and Cairo's political themes were echoed in mass protests celebrating the coup. To Dulles and Eisenhower, there was probably little doubt regarding the origins of the coup.

#### Intervention in Lebanon

Within hours of the Iraqi coup, Chamoun requested American forces.<sup>131</sup> United States Marines began landing on 15 July, but not to destroy his opposition, but only to ensure that he completed his lawful term. The White House also received an immediate message from Saudi Arabia, urging the administration not only to stabilize the Arab East, but to reverse the coup in Iraq.<sup>132</sup> The British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, recommended that Britain and the United States intervene in Iraq and possibly Syria, essentially to secure the entire Arab East by force.<sup>133</sup> Eisenhower and Dulles would assist British troops

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<sup>131</sup> McClintock to Dulles, 14 JUL 1958, FRUS, p. 208.

<sup>132</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Radical Arab Nationalism, p. 92.

<sup>133</sup> William B. Quandt, "Lebanon 1958, and Jordan 1970", Chapter 7 in Force Without War, p. 252-53.



in Jordan with logistical support, but nothing further. The Administration was not intent on re-establishing Western hegemony over the Arab East. Dulles and Eisenhower were instead focused on the Arab revolution under Nasser's control, which they believed was challenging the global credibility of the United States.

Eisenhower had already discounted the Soviets intervening in the Lebanese crisis, providing the American response was limited and did not threaten Egypt or Syria.<sup>134</sup> Dulles however, reasoned that American actions towards Nasser's challenge in Lebanon, would have far reaching global implications. He argued that by moving into Lebanon, the United States would make future confrontations less likely, because it would retain its allies, and give the Soviet Union less encouragement to sponsor subversion in other areas.<sup>135</sup> Regionally, Eisenhower and Dulles saw intervention as the lesser of two evils. Dulles reflected, "we thought we had a third way out in Lebanon, but with events in Iraq, that is no longer

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid #25, p. 227.

<sup>135</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Dulles and Eisenhower, 14 JUL 1958, FRUS, p. 213.



available to us".<sup>136</sup> The Administration recognized it would antagonize anti-West sentiments not only from Suez, but also now from the American-Syrian crisis. However, if the Administration did nothing, there was general agreement that Nasser would eventually dominate the area, with the backing of the Soviet Union. The need not to openly challenge Nasser, a major tenant of the Eisenhower Doctrine, was secondary to maintaining American global credibility.

It was during the Lebanon crisis that Dulles' opinion of Nasser and his threat to the United States apparently crystallized. In a 25 July 1958 letter to Eisenhower, Dulles wrote:

Nasser counts as "friends" those who help him to achieve his ambitions...[He] would be glad to get help from us as well as from the Soviet Union, but that would...lead him to merely move on, and not to moderate his ambitions...[he is not] interested in consolidating what he has, but in going from one political success to another...

Dulles highlighted the policy dilemma of the United States:

...This is what makes the problem so difficult. We are basically wholly sympathetic with Arab nationalism if it means a constructive and productive unity of the Arab peoples. Unfortunately, Nasser's brand of nationalism does not seem to be leading to that...<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid #27, p. 210. The third way out was clearly Hare's negotiations in May and June with Nasir, which came to be seen by Dulles as rewarding subversion more than discouraging it.

<sup>137</sup> Dulles to Eisenhower, 25 JUL 1958, FRUS, p. 464.



Dulles perceived Nasser was being deceitful in his dealings with the United States. Nasser did appear to be playing a double game with the United States. His communications with Washington regarding Syria in December 1957, his overtures of better relations with Washington through March and early July of 1958, followed by events in Jordan and Iraq, surely convinced Dulles that Nasser could not be trusted and his objectives were counter to those of the United States. Nasser's actions upon hearing of the American intervention in Lebanon proved Dulles' assessment to be correct.

Nasser was in Yugoslavia when he learned of the coup in Iraq and the American decision to intervene in Lebanon. Instead of returning to Cairo, he travelled to Moscow to consult with the Soviet leadership. Unknown to the American administration at the time, Nasser wanted Soviet intervention similar to what had transpired in the Syrian crisis, by putting Russian troops on the Turkish border. Khrushchev told him the Soviet Union was "not ready for confrontation" with America.<sup>138</sup> Nasser argued for more support. Khrushchev promised maneuvers on the Turkish border, but reminded Nasser that it is only a maneuver. "Don't

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<sup>138</sup> Mohammed Heikal, The Cairo Documents (New York, 1973), p. 132.



depend on anything more than that".<sup>139</sup> Khrushchev also recommended to Nasser that he alter his tactics and rely less on insurgency to obtain Cairo's goals. To this Nasser did not agree, countering that the Soviets' assessment of the Arab countries was "unrealistic" and that "nothing could be changed without military interference" in other states.<sup>140</sup>

When Nasser left for Cairo on 7 July 1958, he appeared to be in a no-lose situation. American intervention could fuel his propaganda machine and popular image, if Washington did nothing it was only a matter of time before Chamoun would fold. That the intervention seems to have taken Nasser by surprise displays his level of confidence in controlling events in the Arab East prior to 14 July 1958. Perhaps he had come to believe that he was not Washington's third option, but its only option, if Eisenhower and Dulles wished to avoid a Suez scenario. Upon his return however, there were British troops in Jordan and American Marines in Lebanon, but he also found American objectives in Lebanon closely aligned with his own. Washington was not seeking a solution which supported Nasser's expansionism, but it was sympathetic to Arab nationalism.

On 16 July 1958, Eisenhower dispatched Under Secretary of

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid # 30, p. 134.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid #30, p. 144.



State, Robert Murphy to Lebanon. As Murphy's visits with various Lebanese leaders progressed, he consistently stressed that American troops were not in the country to solely support Chamoun.<sup>141</sup> The rebel leaders seemed surprised to hear this, stating they were under the impression the United States was there to hold up Chamoun. Had Nasser failed to inform the rebels of all of Dulles' stated objectives during his mediation efforts? Within a week of the intervention and Murphy's initial negotiations with rebel leaders, the violence subsided. On 31 July 1958, elections were held in the Lebanese parliament, which determined that Chehab would succeed Chamoun. Another objective of Murphy's diplomacy was to assure Cairo and Baghdad that they were not targets of the intervention and that foreign troops would depart once the situations in Lebanon and Jordan were calm.

Murphy's diplomacy appeared aimed at pacifying the Lebanese rebels before going to Cairo. Once in Cairo Murphy did not bargain, he simply informed Nasser what the United States was going to do. Facing the return of American and British forces in the Arab East, combined with doubts of Soviet support, a second failed coup attempt in Jordan, and a stalled

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<sup>141</sup> Robert Murphy, Diplomat Among Warriors (New York, 1964), p. 404-07.



insurrection in Lebanon, there was little Nasser could do but go along with the American intervention.

In terms of containing the Arab revolution in Lebanon itself, the actions of the United States were successful. The 14,000 American troops would be completely withdrawn by 28 October 1958, followed by the last contingent of British troops from Jordan on 2 November. Although Lebanon's many social and economic problems would resurface a decade later, Chehab proved capable of rebuilding the authority of the Presidency that had been weakened by the 1958 Civil War. In addition to achieving a political settlement in Lebanon, King Hussein was bolstered, at least morally, when the General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution in the name of the Arab League calling for all states in the Arab East to "abstain from any action calculated to change established systems of government".<sup>142</sup> Though not specifically stated, this no doubt applied not just to Egypt, but to all powers to include the United States.

The resolution was still more a victory for Washington than Cairo. In a sense, one of the primary objectives of the Eisenhower Doctrine, minimizing subversion, had just been adopted by the United Nations. It was no longer the Washington

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<sup>142</sup> Dann, King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism, p. 95.



containing Cairo, the goal itself was now being given recognition on an international scale. The Lebanese intervention did not diminish the popularity of Nasser and radical nationalism, but it did force into the open and condemn the method of expansion on which Nasser relied. The pattern of Suez was broken.

The American administration's assessment of Nasser during late 1956 and early 1957, also proved to be justified. Lebanon did show Nasser that he could not depend on the Soviet Union for unlimited support and that he had to beware of Moscow's interests. This did not fully materialize however, until 1959. The revolution in Iraq brought in a second Arab leader, General Qassim, who did not intend to subjugate himself to Cairo. To counter his growing Nasserist opposition in Iraq, Qassim allied with the Iraqi Communists who reached a level of power and influence that Dulles always feared. Qassim then established his position to compete for Soviet aid, something Nasser had precluded in Syria, but was powerless to stop in Iraq. By 1959, Nasser was publicly quarreling with both Moscow and Baghdad, while beginning a new dialogue with Washington.



### Conclusion

The reaction of Eisenhower and Dulles to events in the Arab East illustrate a consistency in their adherence to the Two-pillar philosophy behind Anglo-American policy: stability and security. The objective of stability focused on channeling the revolutionary process in the area. The Eisenhower administration was sympathetic to radical nationalism's goal of political autonomy from previous decades of Western imperialism. Washington also advocated increased democracy and economic development, assuming the two together would enhance social and political stability. The method in which the Arab revolution progressed however, ran counter to the second policy pillar of security. As the revolution became more socialistic in character and Nasser's willingness to export it more pronounced, the objectives of Cairo and Washington became more antagonistic towards each other.

For Eisenhower and Dulles, security was achieved by keeping the Soviets away from the oil supplies in the Persian Gulf. Nasser however required Soviet support and the revolution to maintain his prestige and power. Dulles' fear of international communism, coupled with Nasser's requirement of



expansion, put Cairo and Washington on a collision course. It was a conflict of interest which the American administration realized would have to be allowed to take its course. To challenge radical nationalism was to challenge Nasser, and likely result in another Suez scenario. To avoid this, the White House developed the Eisenhower Doctrine. It was simultaneously an open challenge to Moscow, as well as a veiled method of containment directed against Nasser.

The Doctrine was also a practical tool designed to achieve the two objectives of stability and security. In Jordan, it proved the most successful. The Doctrine provided the resources for Hussein to use to secure his position. In Syria, the Doctrine proved useless as an offensive policy, particularly when it became obvious that the Syrian radical nationalists were the intended target. The American failure in Syria was not by fault of the Doctrine however, but in Eisenhower and Dulles equating the ba'athists with the communists. In Lebanon, the Doctrine was not applied. Dulles dismissed its applicability as early as March 1958. By the time of the Iraqi revolution, the Administration was not as concerned with concealing its intentions to contain Nasser, as much as it was in stopping his sponsorship of the Lebanese subversion.

By July 1958, the American leadership perceived that the



relation between Nasser's revolution and the Soviet Union, had evolved to a point where it threatened the global credibility of the United States. This is perhaps the source of Eisenhower's statement, "behind everything was our deep-seated conviction that the Communists were principally responsible for the trouble" in Lebanon.<sup>143</sup> This contrasts sharply with Under Secretary Murphy's own conclusion, that communism "was playing no direct or substantial part in the insurrection".<sup>144</sup> Eisenhower was most likely speaking of Nasser's connection to the Soviets. He never considered Nasser a communist, but Cairo's objectives were parallel to those of Moscow. Both desired instability; Nasser required it for expansion and the Soviets saw Nasser pulling the Arab East away from the West. Washington consistently pursued stability. It is around this fundamental difference that the actions of the Eisenhower administration in the Arab East can best be understood.

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<sup>143</sup> Eisenhower, Waging Peace, p. 266.

<sup>144</sup> Murphy, Diplomat Among Warriors, p. 450.



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Thomas Andrew Dell was born in San Antonio, Texas, on 15 February 1962, the son of Thomas Arthur Dell, M.D., J.D. and Carol Ann Dell. He is married to Patricia Hurtado and they have two children, Kristine and Brandon. Upon graduating from Huron High School, Ann Arbor, Michigan, he entered Eastern Michigan University in August 1980. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in October 1983, and was commissioned through the university's R.O.T.C. program as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army. He has served in a variety of intelligence staff positions with the 66th Military Intelligence Brigade in Europe and was selected for two consecutive command assignments; first with the 1st Psychological Operations Battalion (Airborne) and the second with the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), both at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He is also a veteran of operation Just Cause in Panama during 1989. In August 1992, he entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas.

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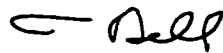
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